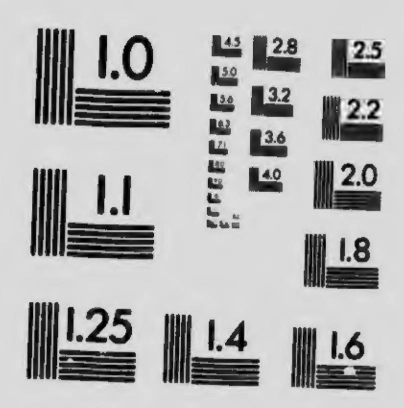
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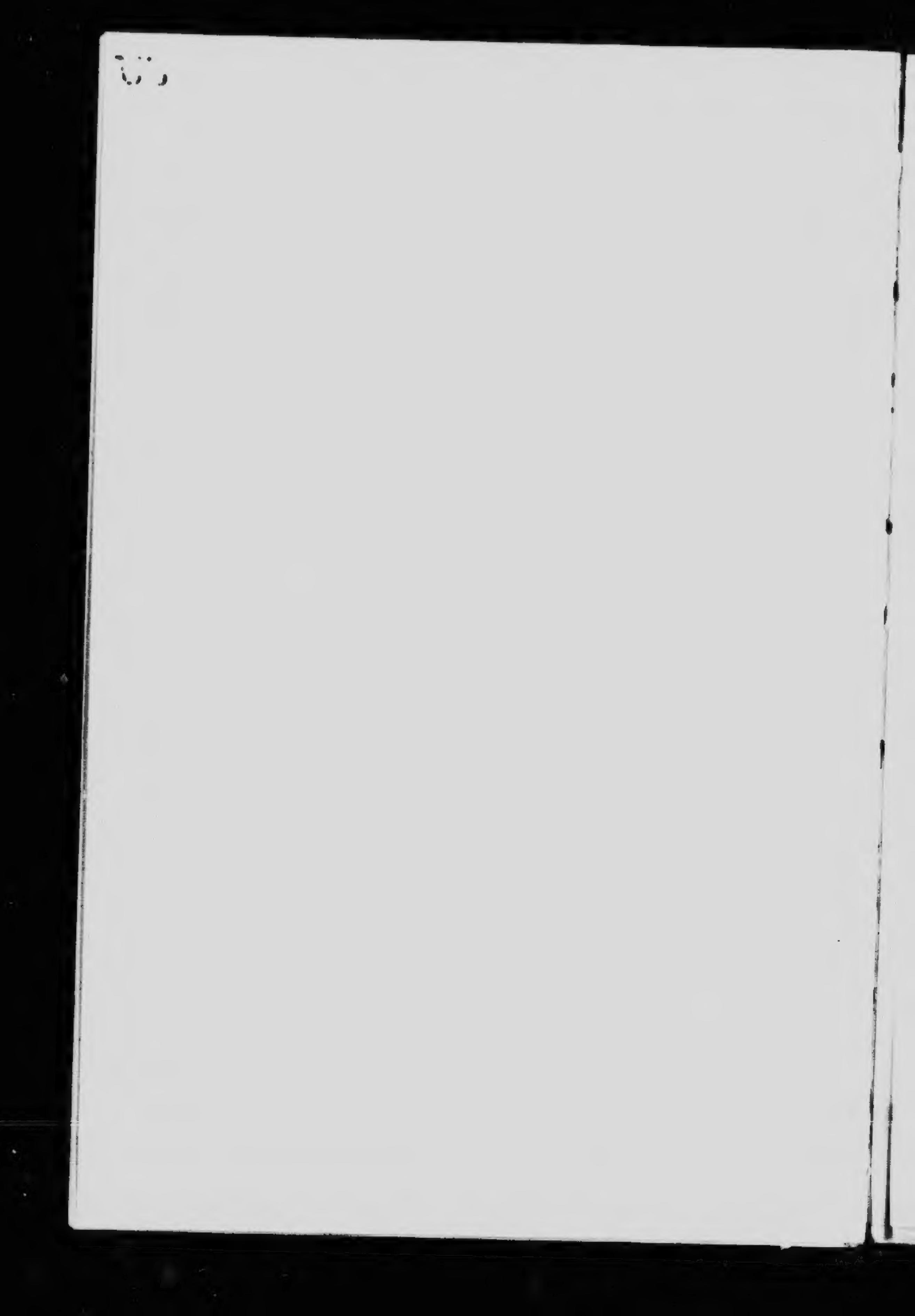




SALOMÉ.

A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY.

VERA.



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SALOMÉ.

A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY.

VERA.

BY

OSCAR WILDE

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A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

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SALOMÉ

DRAME EN UN ACTE

Composed in 1891 in the French language, *Salomé* was *not* written for Madame Sarah Bernhardt, but was accepted by her for production at the Palace Theatre, London, in 1892, when a licence was refused by the Censor. The play was first performed by the Théâtre de L'Œuvre, Paris, in 1896. Private performances have been given, in England, by the New Stage Club in 1905, and by the Literary Theatre Club in 1906. The opera of Dr. Richard Strauss was first produced in Dresden in 1905; an incomplete text is used for the score. The dramatic and literary rights are protected in every language. The original and complete French dramatic version, here reprinted, is the literary and dramatic property of Robert Ross. The German dramatic rights are vested with Herr Ludwig Bloch. The right of English translation is the property of Mr. John Lane. Exclusive of the operatic version, the play is published and constantly performed in eleven different languages.

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A MON AMI

PIERRE LOUŸS

PERSONNES

HÉRODE ANTIPAS. Tétrarque de Judée
IOKANAAN, le prophète
LE JEUNE SYRIEN, capitaine de la garde
TIGELLIN, un jeune Romain
UN CAPPADOCIEN
UN NUBIEN
PREMIER SOLDAT
SECOND SOLDAT
LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS
DES JUIFS, DES NAZARÉENS, etc.
UN ESCLAVE
NAAMAN, le bourreau

HÉRODIAS, Femme du Tétrarque
SALOMÉ, fille d'Hérodias
LES ESCLAVES DE SALOMÉ

SCÈNE

[*Une grande terrasse dans le palais d'Hérode donnant sur la salle de festin. Des soldats sont accoudés sur le balcon. A droite il y a un énorme escalier. A gauche, au fond, une ancienne citerne entourée d'un mur de bronze vert. Clair de lune.*]

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Comme la princesse Salomé est belle ce soir !

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Regardez la lune. La lune a l'air très étrange. On dirait une femme qui sort d'un tombeau. Elle ressemble à une femme morte. On dirait qu'elle cherche des morts.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Elle a l'air très étrange. Elle ressemble à une petite princesse qui porte un voile jaune, et a des pieds d'argent. Elle ressemble à une princesse qui a des pieds comme des petites colombes blanches . . . On dirait qu'elle danse.

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Elle est comme une femme morte. Elle va très lentement. [*Bruit dans la salle de festin.*]

PREMIER SOLDAT

Quel vacarme! Qui sont ces bêtes fauves qui hurlent?

SECOND SOLDAT

Les Juifs. Ils sont toujours ainsi. C'est sur leur religion qu'ils discutent.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Pourquoi discutent-ils sur leur religion?

SECOND SOLDAT

Je ne sais pas. Ils le font toujours . . . Ainsi les Pharisiens affirment qu'il y a des anges, et les Sadducéens disent que les anges n'existent pas.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Je trouve que c'est ridicule de discuter sur de telles choses.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Comme la princesse Salomé est belle ce soir

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Vous la regardez toujours. Vous la regardez

trop. Il ne faut pas regarder les gens de cette façon . . . Il peut arriver un malheur.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Elle est très belle ce soir.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Le tétrarque a l'air sombre.

SECOND SOLDAT

Oui, il a l'air sombre.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Il regarde quelque chose.

SECOND SOLDAT

Il regarde quelqu'un.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Qui regarde-t-il ?

SECOND SOLDAT

Je ne sais pas.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Comme la princesse est pâle ! Jamais je ne l'ai vue si pâle. Elle ressemble au reflet d'une rose blanche dans un miroir d'argent.

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Il ne faut pas la regarder. Vous la regardez trop !

PREMIER SOLDAT

Hérodias a versé à boire au tétrarque.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

C'est la reine Hérodias, celle-là qui porte la mitre noire semée de perles et qui a les cheveux poudrés de bleu ?

PREMIER SOLDAT

Oui, c'est Hérodias. C'est la femme du tétrarque.

SECOND SOLDAT

Le tétrarque aime beaucoup le vin. Il possède des vins de trois espèces. Un qui vient de l'île de Samothrace, qui est pourpre comme le manteau de César.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Je n'ai jamais vu César.

SECOND SOLDAT

Un autre qui vient de la ville de Chypre, qui est jaune comme de l'or.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

J'aime beaucoup l'or.

SECOND SOLDAT

Et le troisième qui est un vin sicilien. Ce vin-là est rouge comme le sang.

LE NUBIEN

Les dieux de mon pays aiment beaucoup le sang. Deux fois par an nous leur sacrifions des jeunes hommes et des vierges : cinquante jeunes hommes et cent vierges. Mais il semble que nous ne leur donnons jamais assez, car ils sont très durs envers nous.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Dans mon pays il n'y a pas de dieux à présent, les Romains les ont chassés. Il y en a qui disent qu'ils se sont réfugiés dans les montagnes, mais je ne le crois pas. Moi, j'ai passé trois nuits sur les montagnes les cherchant partout. Je ne les ai pas trouvés. Enfin, je les ai appelés par leurs noms et ils n'ont pas paru. Je pense qu'ils sont morts.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Les Juifs adorent un Dieu qu'on ne peut pas voir.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Je ne peux pas comprendre cela.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Enfin, ils ne croient qu'aux choses qu'on ne peut pas voir.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Cela me semble absolument ridicule.

LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

Après moi viendra un autre encore plus puissant que moi. Je ne suis pas digne même de délier la courroie de ses sandales. Quand il viendra la terre déserte se réjouira. Elle fleurira comme le lis. Les yeux des aveugles verront le jour, et les oreilles des sourds seront ouvertes . . . Le nouveau-né mettra sa main sur le nid des dragons, et mènera les lions par leurs crinières.

SECOND SOLDAT

Faites-le taire. Il dit toujours des choses absurdes.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Mais non; c'est un saint homme. Il est très doux aussi. Chaque jour je lui donne à manger. Il me remercie toujours.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Qui est-ce?

PREMIER SOLDAT

C'est un prophète.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Quel est son nom ?

PREMIER SOLDAT

Iokanaan.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

D'où vient-il ?

PREMIER SOLDAT

Du désert, où il se nourrissait de sauterelles et de miel sauvage. Il était vêtu de poil de chameau, et autour de ses reins il portait une ceinture de cuir. Son aspect était très farouche. Une grande foule le suivait. Il avait même de disciples.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

De quoi parle-t-il ?

PREMIER SOLDAT

Nous ne savons jamais. Quelquefois il dit des choses épouvantables, mais il est impossible de le comprendre.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Peut-on le voir ?

PREMIER SOLDAT

Non. Le tétrarque ne le permet pas.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

La princesse a caché son visage derrière son éventail ! Ses petites mains blanches s'agitent comme des colombes qui s'envolent vers leurs colombiers. Elles ressemblent à des papillons blancs. Elles sont tout à fait comme des papillons blancs.

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Mais qu'est-ce que cela vous fait ? Pourquoi la regarder ? Il ne faut pas la regarder . . . Il peut arriver un malheur.

LE CAPPADOCIEN [*montrant la citerne*]

Quelle étrange prison !

SECOND SOLDAT

C'est une ancienne citerne.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Une ancienne citerne ! cela doit être très malsain.

SECOND SOLDAT

Mais non. Par exemple, le frère du tétrarque, son frère aîné, le premier mari de la reine Hérodias, a été enfermé là-dedans pendant douze années. Il n'en est pas mort. A la fin il a fallu l'étrangler.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

L'étrangler? Qui a osé faire cela?

SECOND SOLDAT

[*montrant le bourreau, un grand nègre*] Celui-là. Naaman.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Il n'a pas eu peur?

SECOND SOLDAT

Mais non. Le tétrarque lui a envoyé la bague.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Quelle bague?

SECOND SOLDAT

La bague de la mort. Ainsi, il n'a pas eu peur.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Cependant, c'est terrible d'étrangler un roi.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Pourquoi? Les rois n'ont qu'un cou, comme les autres hommes.

LE CAPPADOCIEN

Il me semble que c'est terrible.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Mais la princesse se lève! Elle quitte la table! Elle a l'air très ennuyée. Ah! elle vient par ici. Oui, elle vient vers nous. Comme elle est pâle. Jamais je ne l'ai vue si pâle . . .

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Ne la regardez pas. Je vous prie de ne pas la regarder.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Elle est comme une colombe qui s'est égarée . . . Elle est comme un narcisse agité du vent . . . Elle ressemble à une fleur d'argent.

[*Entre* SALOMÉ.]

SALOMÉ

Je ne resterai pas. Je ne peux pas rester. Pourquoi le tétrarque me regarde-t-il toujours avec ses yeux de taupe sous ses paupières tremblantes? . . . C'est étrange que le mari de ma mère me regarde comme cela. Je ne sais pas ce que cela veut dire. . . Au fait, si, je le sais.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Vous venez de quitter le festin, princesse?

SALOMÉ

Comme l'air est frais ici! Enfin, ici on respire! Là-dedans il y a des Juifs de Jérusalem qui se déchirent à cause de leurs ridicules cérémonies, et des barbares qui boivent toujours et jettent leur vin sur les dalles, et des Grecs de Smyrne avec leurs yeux peints et leurs joues fardées, et leurs cheveux frisés en spirales, et des Égyptiens, silencieux, subtils, avec leurs ongles de jade et leurs manteaux bruns, et des Romains avec leur brutalité, leur lourdeur, leurs gros mots. Ah! que je déteste les Romains! Ce sont des gens communs, et ils se donnent des airs de grands seigneurs.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Ne voulez-vous pas vous asseoir, princesse?

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Pourquoi lui parler? Pourquoi la regarder? . . . Oh! il va arriver un malheur.

SALOMÉ

Que c'est bon de voir la lune! Elle ressemble à une petite pièce de monnaie. On dirait une toute petite fleur d'argent. Elle est froide et chaste, la lune . . . Je suis sûre qu'elle est

vierge. Elle a la beauté d'une vierge . . . Oui, elle est vierge. Elle ne s'est jamais souillée. Elle ne s'est jamais donnée aux hommes, comme les autres Déesses.

LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

Il est venu, le Seigneur ! Il est venu, le fils de l'Homme. Les centaures se sont cachés dans les rivières, et les sirènes ont quitté les rivières et couchent sous les feuilles dans les forêts.

SALOMÉ

Qui a crié cela ?

SECOND SOLDAT

C'est le prophète, princesse.

SALOMÉ

Ah ! le prophète. Celui dont le tétrarque a peur ?

SECOND SOLDAT

Nous ne savons rien de cela, princesse. C'est le prophète Iokanaan.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Voulez-vous que je commande votre litière, princesse ? Il fait très beau dans le jardin.

SALOMÉ

Il dit des choses monstrueuses, à propos de ma mère, n'est-ce pas ?

SECOND SOLDAT

Nous ne comprenons jamais ce qu'il dit, princesse.

SALOMÉ

Oui, il dit des choses monstrueuses d'elle.

UN ESCLAVE

Princesse, le tétrarque vous prie de retourner au festin.

SALOMÉ

Je n'y retournerai pas.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Pardon, princesse, mais si vous n'y retourniez pas il pourrait arriver un malheur.

SALOMÉ

Est-ce un vieillard, le prophète ?

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Princesse, il vaudrait mieux retourner. Permettez-moi de vous reconduire.

SALOMÉ

Le prophète . . . est-ce un vieillard ?

PREMIER SOLDAT

Non, princesse, c'est un tout jeune homme.

SECOND SOLDAT

On ne le sait pas. Il y en a qui disent que c'est Élie?

SALOMÉ

Qui est Élie?

SECOND SOLDAT

Un très ancien prophète de ce pays, princesse.

UN ESCLAVE

Quelle réponse dois-je donner au tétrarque de la part de la princesse?

LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

Ne te réjouis point, terre de Palestine, parce que la verge de celui qui te frappait a été brisée. Car de la race du serpent il sortira un basilic, et ce qui en naîtra dévorera les oiseaux.

SALOMÉ

Quelle étrange voix! Je voudrais bien lui parler.

PREMIER SOLDAT

J'ai peur que ce soit impossible, princesse.

Le tétrarque ne veut pas qu'on lui parle. Il a même défendu au grand prêtre de lui parler.

SALOMÉ

Je veux lui parler.

PREMIER SOLDAT

C'est impossible, princesse.

SALOMÉ

Je le veux.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

En effet, princesse, il vaudrait mieux retourner au festin.

SALOMÉ

Faites sortir le prophète.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Nous n'osons pas, princesse.

SALOMÉ [*s'approchant de la citerne et y regardant*]

Comme il fait noir là-dedans. Cela doit être terrible d'être dans un trou si noir! Cela ressemble à une tombe . . . [*aux soldats*] Vous ne m'avez pas entendue? Faites-le sortir. Je veux le voir.

SECOND SOLDAT

Je vous prie, princesse, de ne pas nous demander cela.

SALOMÉ

Vous me faites attendre.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Princesse, nos vies vous appartiennent, mais nous ne pouvons pas faire ce que vous nous demandez . . . Enfin, ce n'est pas à nous qu'il faut vous adresser.

SALOMÉ [*regardant le jeune Syrien*]

Ah!

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Oh! qu'est-ce qu'il va arriver? Je suis sûr qu'il va arriver un malheur.

SALOMÉ [*s'approchant du jeune Syrien*]

Vous ferez cela pour moi, n'est-ce pas, Narraboth? Vous ferez cela pour moi? J'ai toujours été douce pour vous. N'est-ce pas que vous ferez cela pour moi? Je veux seulement le regarder, cet étrange prophète. On a tant parlé de lui. J'ai si souvent entendu le tétrarque parler de lui. Je pense qu'il a peur de lui, le tétrarque. Je suis sûre qu'il

a peur de lui . . . Est-ce que vous aussi, Narraboth, est-ce que vous aussi vous en avez peur ?

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Je n'ai pas peur de lui, princesse. Je n'ai peur de personne. Mais le tétrarque a formellement défendu qu'on lève le couvercle de ce puits.

SALOMÉ

Vous ferez cela pour moi, Narraboth, et demain quand je passerai dans ma litière sous la porte des vendeurs d'idoles, je laisserai tomber une petite fleur pour vous, une petite fleur verte.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Princesse, je ne peux pas, je ne peux pas.

SALOMÉ [*souriant*]

Vous ferez cela pour moi, Narraboth. Vous savez bien que vous ferez cela pour moi. Et demain quand je passerai dans ma litière sur le pont des acheteurs d'idoles je vous regarderai à travers les voiles de mousseline, je vous regarderai, Narraboth, je vous sourirai, peut-être. Regardez-moi, Narraboth. Regardez-

moi. Ah! vous savez bien que vous allez faire ce que je vous demande. Vous le savez bien, n'est-ce pas? . . . Moi, je sais bien.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

[*faisant un signe au troisième soldat*]

Faites sortir le prophète . . . La princesse Salomé veut le voir.

SALOMÉ

Ah!

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Oh! comme la lune a l'air étrange! On dirait la main d'une morte qui cherche à se couvrir avec un linceul.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Elle a l'air très étrange. On dirait une petite princesse qui a des yeux d'ambre. A travers les nuages de mousseline elle sourit comme une petite princesse.

[*Le prophète sort de la citerne. Salomé le regarde et recule.*]

IOKANAAN

Où est celui dont la coupe d'abominations est déjà pleine? Où est celui qui en robe d'argent mourra un jour devant tout le

peuple ? Dites-lui de venir afin qu'il puisse entendre la voix de celui qui a crié dans les déserts et dans les palais des rois.

SALOMÉ

De qui parle-t-il ?

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

On ne sait jamais, princesse.

IOKANAAN

Où est celle qui ayant vu des hommes peints sur la muraille, des images de Chaldéens tracées avec des couleurs, s'est laissée emporter à la concupiscence de ses yeux, et a envoyé des ambassadeurs en Chaldée ?

SALOMÉ

C'est de ma mère qu'il parle.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Mais non, princesse.

SALOMÉ

Si, c'est de ma mère.

IOKANAAN

Où est celle qui s'est abandonnée aux capitaines des Assyriens, qui ont des baudriers sur les reins, et sur la tête des tiares de différentes couleurs ? Où est celle qui s'est abandonnée

aux jeunes hommes d'Égypte qui sont vêtus de lin et d'hyacinthe, et portent des boucliers d'or et des casques d'argent, et qui ont de grands corps ? Dites-lui de se lever de la couche de son impudicité, de sa couche incestueuse, afin qu'elle puisse entendre les paroles de celui qui prépare la voie du Seigneur ; afin qu'elle se repente de ses péchés. Quoiqu'elle ne se repentira jamais, mais restera dans ses abominations, dites-lui de venir, car le Seigneur a son fléau dans la main.

SALOMÉ

Mais il est terrible, il est terrible.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Ne restez pas ici, princesse, je vous en prie.

SALOMÉ

Ce sont les yeux surtout qui sont terribles. On dirait des trous noirs laissés par des flambeaux sur une tapisserie de Tyr. On dirait des cavernes noires où demeurent des dragons, des cavernes noires d'Égypte où les dragons trouvent leur asile. On dirait des lacs noirs troublés par des lunes fantastiques . . . Pensez-vous qu'il parlera encore ?

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Ne restez pas ici, princesse ! Je vous prie de ne pas rester ici.

SALOMÉ

Comme il est maigre aussi ! il ressemble à une mince image d'ivoire. On dirait une image d'argent. Je suis sûre qu'il est chaste, autant que la lune. Il ressemble à un rayon d'argent. Sa chair doit être très froide, comme de l'ivoire . . . Je veux le regarder de près.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Non, non, princesse !

SALOMÉ

Il faut que je le regarde de près.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Princesse ! Princesse !

IOKANAAN

Qui est cette femme qui me regarde ? Je ne veux pas qu'elle me regarde. Pourquoi me regarde-t-elle avec ses yeux d'or sous ses paupières dorées ? Je ne sais pas qui c'est. Je ne veux pas le savoir. Dites-lui de s'en aller. Ce n'est pas à elle que je veux parler.

SALOMÉ

Je suis Salomé, fille d'Hérodias, princesse de Judée.

IOKANAAN

Arrière! Fille de Babylone! N'approchez pas de l'élu du Seigneur. Ta mère a rempli la terre du vin de ses iniquités, et le cri de ses péchés est arrivé aux oreilles de Dieu

SALOMÉ

Parle encore, Iokanaan. Ta voix m'enivre.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Princesse! Princesse! Princesse!

SALOMÉ

Mais parle encore. Parle encore, Iokanaan, et dis-moi ce qu'il faut que je fasse.

IOKANAAN

Ne m'approchez pas, fille de Sodome, mais couvrez votre visage avec un voile, et mettez des cendres sur votre tête, et allez dans le désert chercher le fils de l'Homme.

SALOMÉ

Qui est-ce, le fils de l'Homme? Est-il aussi beau que toi, Iokanaan?

IOKANAAN

Arrière ! Arrière ! J'entends dans le palais le battement des ailes de l'ange de la mort.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Princesse, je vous supplie de rentrer !

IOKANAAN

Ange du Seigneur Dieu, que fais-tu ici avec ton glaive ? Qui cherches-tu dans cet immonde palais ?... Le jour de celui qui mourra en robe d'argent n'est pas venu.

SALOMÉ

Iokanaan !

IOKANAAN

Qui parle ?

SALOMÉ

Iokanaan ! Je suis amoureuse de ton corps. Ton corps est blanc comme le lis d'un pré que le faucheur n'a jamais fauché. Ton corps est blanc comme les neiges qui couchent sur les montagnes, comme les neiges qui couchent sur les montagnes de Judée, et descendent dans les vallées. Les roses du jardin de la reine d'Arabie ne sont pas aussi blanches que

ton corps. Ni les roses du jardin de la reine d'Arabie, ni les pieds de l'aurore qui trépignent sur les feuilles, ni le sein de la lune quand elle couche sur le sein de la mer . . . Il n'y a rien au monde d'aussi blanc que ton corps. — Laisse-moi toucher ton corps!

IOKANAAN

Arrière, fille de Babylone! C'est par la femme que le mal est entré dans le monde. Ne me parlez pas. Je ne veux pas t'écouter. Je n'écoute que les paroles du Seigneur Dieu.

SALOMÉ

Ton corps est hideux. Il est comme le corps d'un lépreux. Il est comme un mur de plâtre où les vipères sont passées, comme un mur de plâtre où les scorpions ont fait leur nid. Il est comme un sépulcre blanchi, et qui est plein de choses dégoûtantes. Il est horrible, il est horrible ton corps! . . . C'est de tes cheveux que je suis amoureuse, Iokanaan. Tes cheveux ressemblent à des grappes de raisins, à des grappes de raisins noirs qui pendent des vignes d'Edom dans le pays des Edomites. Tes cheveux sont comme les cèdres du Liban, comme les grands

cèdres du Liban qui donnent de l'ombre aux lions et aux voleurs qui veulent se cacher pendant la journée. Les longues nuits noires, les nuits où la lune ne se montre pas, où les étoiles ont peur, ne sont pas aussi noires. Le silence qui demeure dans les forêts n'est pas aussi noir. Il n'y a rien au monde d'aussi noir que tes cheveux . . . Laisse-moi toucher tes cheveux.

IOKANAAN

Arrière, fille de Sodome! Ne me touchez pas. Il ne faut pas profaner le temple du Seigneur Dieu.

SALOMÉ

Tes cheveux sont horribles. Ils sont couverts de boue et de poussière. On dirait une couronne d'épines qu'on a placée sur ton front. On dirait un nœud de serpents noirs qui se tortillent autour de ton cou. Je n'aime pas tes cheveux . . . C'est de ta bouche que je suis amoureuse, Iokanaan. Ta bouche est comme une bande d'écarlate sur une tour d'ivoire. Elle est comme une pomme de grenade coupée par un couteau d'ivoire. Les fleurs

de grenade qui fleurissent dans les jardins de Tyr et sont plus rouges que les roses, ne sont pas aussi rouges. Les cris rouges des trompettes qui annoncent l'arrivée des rois, et font peur à l'ennemi ne sont pas aussi rouges. Ta bouche est plus rouge que les pieds de ceux qui foulent le vin dans les pressoirs. Elle est plus rouge que les pieds des colombes qui demeurent dans les temples et sont nourries par les prêtres. Elle est plus rouge que les pieds de celui qui revient d'une forêt où il a tué un lion et vu des tigres dorés. Ta bouche est comme une branche de corail que des pêcheurs ont trouvée dans le crépuscule da la mer et qu'ils réservent pour les rois . . . ! Elle est comme le vermillon que les Moabites trouvent dans les mines de Moab et que les rois leur prennent. Elle est comme l'arc du roi des Perses qui est peint avec du vermillon et qui a des cornes de corail. Il n'y a rien au monde d'aussi rouge que ta bouche . . . laisse-moi baiser ta bouche.

IOKANAAN

Jamais ! fille de Babylone ! Fille de Sodome ! jamais.

SALOMÉ

Je baiserai ta bouche, Iokanaan. Je baiserai ta bouche.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Princesse, princesse, toi qui es comme un bouquet de myrrhe, toi qui es la colombe des colombes, ne regarde pas cet homme, ne le regarde pas! Ne lui dis pas de telles choses. Je ne peux pas les souffrir . . . Princesse, princesse, ne dis pas de ces choses.

SALOMÉ

Je baiserai ta bouche, Iokanaan.

LE JEUNE SYRIEN

Ah!

[*Il se tue et tombe entre Salomé et Iokanaan.*]

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Le jeune Syrien s'est tué! le jeune capitaine s'est tué! Il s'est tué, celui qui était mon ami! Je lui avais donné une petite boîte de parfums, et des boucles d'oreilles faites en argent, et maintenant il s'est tué! Ah! n'a-t-il pas prédit qu'un malheur allait arriver? . . . Je l'ai prédit moi-même et il est arrivé. Je savais bien que la lune cherchait un mort, mais je ne

savais pas que c'était lui qu'elle cherchait. Ah! pourquoi ne l'ai-je pas caché de la lune? Si je l'avais caché dans une caverne elle ne l'aurait pas vu.

LE PREMIER SOLDAT

Princesse, le jeune capitaine vient de se tuer.

SALOMÉ

Laisse-moi baiser ta bouche, Iokanaan.

IOKANAAN

N'avez-vous pas peur, fille d'Hérodias? Ne vous ai-je pas dit que j'avais entendu dans le palais le battement des ailes de l'ange de la mort, et l'ange n'est-il pas venu?

SALOMÉ

Laisse-moi baiser ta bouche.

IOKANAAN

Fille d'adultère, il n'y a qu'un homme qui puisse te sauver. C'est celui dont je t'ai parlé. Allez le chercher. Il est dans un bateau sur la mer de Galilée, et il parle à ses disciples. Agenouillez-vous au bord de la mer, et appelez-le par son nom. Quand il viendra vers vous, et il vient vers tous ceux qui

l'appellent, prosternez-vous à ses pieds et demandez-lui la rémission de vos péchés.

SALOMÉ

Laisse-moi baiser ta bouche.

IOKANAAN

Soyez maudite, fille d'une mère incestueuse, soyez maudite.

SALOMÉ

Je baiserai ta bouche, Iokanaan.

IOKANAAN

Je ne veux pas te regarder. Je ne te regarderai pas. Tu es maudite, Salomé, tu es maudite.

[*Il descend dans la citerne.*]

SALOMÉ

Je baiserai ta bouche, Iokanaan, je baiserai ta bouche.

LE PREMIER SOLDAT

Il faut faire transporter le cadavre ailleurs. Le tétrarque n'aime pas regarder les cadavres, sauf les cadavres de ceux qu'il a tués lui-même.

LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS

Il était mon frère, et plus proche qu'un

frère. Je lui ai donné une petite boîte qui contenait des parfums, et une bague d'agate qu'il portait toujours à la main. Le soir nous nous promenions au bord de la rivière et parmi les amandiers et il me racontait des choses de son pays. Il parlait toujours très bas. Le son de sa voix ressemblait au son de la flûte d'un joueur de flûte. Aussi il aimait beaucoup à se regarder dans la rivière. Je lui ai fait des reproches pour cela.

SECOND SOLDAT

Vous avez raison ; il faut cacher le cadavre. Il ne faut pas que le tétrarque le voie.

PREMIER SOLDAT

Le tétrarque ne viendra pas ici. Il ne vient jamais sur la terrasse. Il a trop peur du prophète.

[*Entrée d'Hérode, d'Hérodias et de toute la cour.*]

HÉRODE

Où est Salomé ? Où est la princesse ? Pourquoi n'est-elle pas retournée au festin comme je le lui avais commandé ? ah ! la voilà !

HÉRODIAS

Il ne faut pas la regarder. Vous la regardez toujours!

HÉRODE

La lune a l'air très étrange ce soir. N'est-ce pas que la lune a l'air très étrange? On dirait une femme hystérique, une femme hystérique qui va cherchant des amants partout. Elle est nue aussi. Elle est toute nue. Les nuages cherchent à la vêtir, mais elle ne veut pas. Elle chancelle à travers les nuages comme une femme ivre . . . Je suis sûr qu'elle cherche des amants . . . N'est-ce pas qu'elle chancelle comme une femme ivre? Elle ressemble à une femme hystérique, n'est-ce pas?

HÉRODIAS

Non. La lune ressemble à la lune, c'est tout. Rentrons . . . Vous n'avez rien à faire ici.

HÉRODE

Je resterai! Manassé, mettez des tapis là. Allumez des flambeaux. Apportez les tables d'ivoire, et les tables de jaspe. L'air ici est délicieux. Je boirai encore du vin avec mes

hôtes. Aux ambassadeurs de César il faut faire tout honneur.

HÉRODIAS

Ce n'est pas à cause d'eux que vous restez.

HÉRODE

Oui, l'air est délicieux. Viens, Hérodias, nos hôtes nous attendent. Ah! j'ai glissé! j'ai glissé dans le sang! C'est d'un mauvais présage. C'est d'un très mauvais présage. Pourquoi y a-t-il du sang ici? . . . Et ce cadavre? Que fait ici ce cadavre? Pensez-vous que je sois comme le roi d'Égypte qui ne donne jamais un festin sans montrer un cadavre à ses hôtes? Enfin, qui est-ce? Je ne veux pas le regarder.

PREMIER SOLDAT

C'est notre capitaine, Seigneur. C'est le jeune Syrien que vous avez fait capitaine il y a trois jours seulement.

HÉRODE

Je n'ai donné aucun ordre de le tuer.

SECOND SOLDAT

Il s'est tué lui-même, Seigneur.

HÉRODE

Pourquoi ? Je l'ai fait capitaine !

SECOND SOLDAT

Nous ne savons pas, Seigneur. Mais il s'est tué lui-même.

HÉRODE

Cela me semble étrange. Je pensais qu'il n'y avait que les philosophes romains qui se tuaient. N'est-ce pas, Tigellin, que les philosophes à Rome se tuent ?

TIGELLIN

Il y en a qui se tuent, Seigneur. Ce sont les Stoïciens. Ce sont des gens très grossiers. Enfin, ce sont des gens très ridicules. Moi, je les trouve très ridicules.

HÉRODE

Moi aussi. C'est ridicule de se tuer.

TIGELLIN

On rit beaucoup d'eux à Rome. L'empereur a fait un poème satirique contre eux. On le récite partout.

HÉRODE

Ah ! il a fait un poème satirique contre eux ? César est merveilleux. Il peut tout faire . . .

C'est étrange qu'il se soit tué, le jeune Syrien. Je le regrette. Oui, je le regrette beaucoup. Car il était beau. Il était même très beau. Il avait des yeux très langoureux. Je me rappelle que je l'ai vu regardant Salomé d'une façon langoureuse. En effet, j'ai trouvé qu'il l'avait un peu trop regardée.

HÉRODIAS

Il y en a d'autres qui la regardent trop.

HÉRODE

Son père était roi. Je l'ai chassé de son royaume. Et de sa mère qui était reine vous avez fait une esclave, Hérodias. Ainsi, il était ici comme un hôte. C'était à cause de cela que je l'avais fait capitaine. Je regrette qu'il soit mort . . . Enfin, pourquoi avez-vous laissé le cadavre ici ? Il faut l'emporter ailleurs. Je ne veux pas le voir . . . Emportez-le . . . [*On emporte le cadavre.*] Il fait froid ici. Il y a du vent ici. N'est-ce pas qu'il y a du vent ?

HÉRODIAS

Mais non. Il n'y a pas de vent.

HÉRODE

Mais si, il y a du vent . . . Et j'entends dans l'air quelque chose comme un battement d'ailes, comme un battement d'ailes gigantesques. Ne l'entendez-vous pas?

HÉRODIAS

Je n'entends rien.

HÉRODE

Je ne l'entends plus moi-même. Mais je l'ai entendu. C'était le vent sans doute. C'est passé. Mais non, je l'entends encore. Ne l'entendez-vous pas? C'est tout à fait comme un battement d'ailes.

HÉRODIAS

Je vous dis qu'il n'y a rien. Vous êtes malade. Rentrons.

HÉRODE

Je ne suis pas malade. C'est votre fille qui est malade. Elle a l'air très malade, votre fille. Jamais je ne l'ai vue si pâle.

HÉRODIAS

Je vous ai dit de ne pas la regarder.

HÉRODE

Versez du vin. [*On apporte du vin.*] Salomé,

venez boire un peu de vin avec moi. J'ai un vin ici qui est exquis. C'est César lui-même qui me l'a envoyé. Trempez là-dedans vos petites lèvres rouges et ensuite je viderai la coupe.

SALOMÉ

Je n'ai pas soif, tétrarque.

HÉRODE

Vous entendez comme elle me répond, votre fille.

HÉRODIAS

Je trouve qu'elle a bien raison. Pourquoi la regardez-vous toujours?

HÉRODE

Apportez des fruits. [*On apporte des fruits.*] Salomé, venez manger du fruit avec moi. J'aime beaucoup voir dans un fruit la morsure de tes petites dents. Mordez un tout petit morceau de ce fruit, et ensuite je mangerai ce qui reste.

SALOMÉ

Je n'ai pas faim, tétrarque.

HÉRODE [*à Hérodias*]

Voilà comme vous l'avez élevée, votre fille.

HÉRODIAS

Ma fille et moi, nous descendons d'une race royale. Quant à toi, ton grand-père gardait des chameaux ! Aussi, c'était un voleur !

HÉRODE

Tu mens !

HÉRODIAS

Tu sais bien que c'est la vérité.

HÉRODE

Salomé, viens t'asseoir près de moi. Je te donnerai le trône de ta mère.

SALOMÉ

Je ne suis pas fatiguée, tétrarque.

HÉRODIAS

Vous voyez bien ce qu'elle pense de vous.

HÉRODE

Apportez . . . Qu'est-ce que je veux ? Je ne sais pas. Ah ! Ah ! je m'en souviens . . .

LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

Voici le temps ! Ce que j'ai prédit est arrivé, dit le Seigneur Dieu. Voici le jour dont j'avais parlé.

HÉRODIAS

Faites-le taire. Je ne veux pas entendre sa voix. Cet homme vomit toujours des injures contre moi.

HÉRODE

Il n'a rien dit contre vous. Aussi, c'est un très grand prophète.

HÉRODIAS

Je ne crois pas aux prophètes. Est-ce qu'un homme peut dire ce qui doit arriver? Personne ne le sait. Aussi, il m'insulte toujours. Mais je pense que vous avez peur de lui . . . Enfin, je sais bien que vous avez peur de lui.

HÉRODE

Je n'ai pas peur de lui. Je n'ai peur de personne.

HÉRODIAS

Si, vous avez peur de lui. Si vous n'aviez pas peur de lui, pourquoi ne pas le livrer aux Juifs qui depuis six mois vous le demandent?

UN JUIF

En effet, Seigneur, il serait mieux de nous le livrer.

HÉRODE

Assez sur ce point. Je vous ai déjà donné ma réponse. Je ne veux pas vous le livrer. C'est un homme qui a vu Dieu.

UN JUIF

Cela, c'est impossible. Personne n'a vu Dieu depuis le prophète Élie. Lui c'est le dernier qui ait vu Dieu. En ce temps ci, Dieu ne se montre pas. Il se cache. Et par conséquent il y a de grands malheurs dans le pays.

UN AUTRE JUIF

Enfin, on ne sait pas si le prophète Élie a réellement vu Dieu. C'était plutôt l'ombre de Dieu qu'il a vue.

UN TROISIÈME JUIF

Dieu ne se cache jamais. Il se montre toujours et dans toute chose. Dieu est dans le mal comme dans le bien.

UN QUATRIÈME JUIF

Il ne faut pas dire cela. C'est une idée très dangereuse. C'est une idée qui vient des écoles d'Alexandrie où on enseigne la philosophie grecque. Et les Grecs sont des gentils. Ils ne sont pas même circoncis.

UN CINQUIÈME JUIF

On ne peut pas savoir comment Dieu agit, ses voies sont très mystérieuses. Peut-être ce que nous appelons le mal est le bien, et ce que nous appelons le bien est le mal. On ne peut rien savoir. Le nécessaire c'est de se soumettre à tout. Dieu est très fort. Il brise au même temps les faibles et les forts. Il n'a aucun souci de personne.

LE PREMIER JUIF

C'est vrai cela. Dieu est terrible. Il brise les faibles et les forts comme on brise le blé dans un mortier. Mais cet homme n'a jamais vu Dieu. Personne n'a vu Dieu depuis le prophète Élie.

HÉRODIAS

Faites-les taire. Ils m'ennuient.

HÉRODE

Mais j'ai entendu dire qu'Iokanaan lui-même est votre prophète Élie.

LE JUIF

Cela ne se peut pas. Depuis le temps du prophète Élie il y a plus de trois cents ans.

HÉRODE

Il y en a qui disent que c'est le prophète Élie.

UN NAZARÉEN

Moi, je suis sûr que c'est le prophète Élie.

LE JUIF

Mais non, ce n'est pas le prophète Élie.

LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

Le jour est venu, le jour du Seigneur, et j'entends sur les montagnes les pieds de celui qui sera le Sauveur du monde.

HÉRODE

Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire ? Le Sauveur du monde ?

TIGELLIN

C'est un titre que prend César.

HÉRODE

Mais César ne vient pas en Judée. J'ai reçu hier des lettres de Rome. On ne m'a rien dit de cela. Enfin, vous, Tigellin, qui avez été à Rome pendant l'hiver, vous n'avez rien entendu dire de cela ?

TIGELLIN

En effet, Seigneur, je n'en ai pas entendu

parler. J'explique seulement le titre. C'est un des titres de César.

HÉRODE

Il ne peut pas venir, César. Il est goutteux. On dit qu'il a des pieds d'éléphant. Aussi il y a des raisons d'État. Celui qui quitte Rome perd Rome. Il ne viendra pas. Mais, enfin, c'est le maître, César. Il viendra s'il veut. Mais je ne pense pas qu'il vienne.

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Ce n'est pas de César que le prophète a parlé, Seigneur.

HÉRODE

Pas de César ?

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Non, Seigneur.

HÉRODE

De qui donc a-t-il parlé ?

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Du Messie qui est venu.

UN JUIF

Le Messie n'est pas venu.

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Il est venu, et il fait des miracles partout.

HÉRODIAS

Oh ! oh ! les miracles. Je ne crois pas aux miracles. J'en ai vu trop. [*Au page.*] Mon éventail.

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Cet homme fait de véritables miracles. Ainsi, à l'occasion d'un mariage qui a eu lieu dans une petite ville de Galilée, une ville assez importante, il a changé de l'eau en vin. Des personnes qui étaient là me l'ont dit. Aussi il a guéri deux lépreux qui étaient assis devant la porte de Capharnaüm, seulement en les touchant.

LE SECOND NAZARÉEN

Non, c'étaient deux aveugles qu'il a guéris à Capharnaüm.

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Non, c'étaient des lépreux. Mais il a guéri des aveugles aussi, et on l'a vu sur une montagne parlant avec des anges.

UN SADDUCÉEN

Les anges n'existent pas.

UN PHARISIEN

Les anges existent, mais je ne crois pas que cet homme leur ait parlé.

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Il a été vu par une foule de passants parlant avec des anges.

UN SADDUCÉEN

Pas avec des anges.

HÉRODIAS

Comme ils m'agacent, ces hommes! Ils sont bêtes. Ils sont tout à fait bêtes. [*Au page*] Eh! bien, mon éventail. [*Le page lui donne l'éventail.*] Vous avez l'air de rêver. Il ne faut pas rêver. Les rêveurs sont des malades. [*Elle frappe le page avec son éventail.*]

LE SECOND NAZARÉEN

Aussi il y a le miracle de la fille de Jaïre.

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Mais oui, c'est très certain cela. On ne peut pas le nier.

HÉRODIAS

Ces gens-là sont fous. Ils ont trop regardé la lune. Dites-leur de se taire.

HÉRODE

Qu'est-ce que c'est que cela, le miracle de la fille de Jaïre?

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

La fille de Jaïre était morte. Il l'a ressuscitée.

HÉRODE

Il ressuscite les morts ?

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Oui, Seigneur. Il ressuscite les morts.

HÉRODE

Je ne veux pas qu'il fasse cela. Je lui défends de faire cela. Je ne permets pas qu'on ressuscite les morts. Il faut chercher cet homme et lui dire que je ne lui permets pas de ressusciter les morts. Où est-il à présent, cet homme ?

LE SECOND NAZARÉEN

Il est partout, Seigneur, mais est-il très difficile de le trouver.

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

On dit qu'il est en Samarie à présent.

UN JUIF

On voit bien que ce n'est le Messie, s'il est en Samarie. Ce n'est pas aux Samaritains que le Messie viendra. Les Samaritains sont

maudits. Ils n'apportent jamais d'offrandes au temple.

LE SECOND NAZARÉEN

Il a quitté la Samarie il y a quelques jours. Moi, je crois qu'en ce moment-ci il est dans les environs de Jérusalem.

LE PREMIER NAZARÉEN

Mais non, il n'est pas là. Je viens justement d'arriver de Jérusalem. On n'a pas entendu parler de lui depuis deux mois.

HÉRODE

Enfin, cela ne fait rien! Mais il faut le trouver et lui dire de ma part que je ne lui permets pas de ressusciter les morts. Changer de l'eau en vin, guérir les lépreux et les aveugles . . . il peut faire tout cela s'il le veut. Je n'ai rien à dire contre cela. En effet, je trouve que guérir les lépreux est une bonne action. Mais je ne permets pas qu'il ressuscite les morts . . . Ce serait terrible, si les morts reviennent.

LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

Ah! l'impudique! la prostituée! Ah! la fille de Babylone avec ses yeux d'or et ses

paupières dorées! Voici ce que dit le Seigneur Dieu. Faites venir contre elle une multitude d'hommes. Que le peuple prenne des pierres et la lapide . . .

HÉRODIAS

Faites-le taire!

LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

Que les capitaines de guerre la percent de leurs épées, qu'ils l'écrasent sous leurs boucliers.

HÉRODIAS

Mais, c'est infâme.

LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

C'est ainsi que j'abolirai les crimes de dessus la terre, et que toutes les femmes apprendront à ne pas imiter les abominations de celle-là.

HÉRODIAS

Vous entendez ce qu'il dit contre moi? Vous le laissez insulter votre épouse?

HÉRODE

Mais il n'a pas dit votre nom.

HÉRODIAS

Qu'est-ce que cela fait? Vous savez bien

que c'est moi qu'il cherche à insulter. Et je suis votre épouse, n'est-ce pas ?

HÉRODE

Oui, chère et digne Hérodias, vous êtes mon épouse, et vous avez commencé par être l'épouse de mon frère.

HÉRODIAS

C'est vous qui m'avez arrachée de ses bras.

HÉRODE

En effet, j'étais le plus fort . . . mais ne parlons pas de cela. Je ne veux pas parler de cela. C'est à cause de cela que le prophète a dit des mots d'épouvante. Peut-être à cause de cela va-t-il arriver un malheur. N'en parlons pas . . . Noble Hérodias, nous oublions nos convives. Verse-moi à boire, ma bien-aimée. Remplissez de vin les grandes coupes d'argent et les grandes coupes de verre. Je vais boire à la santé de César. Il y a des Romains ici, il faut boire à la santé de César.

TOUS

César ! César !

HÉRODE

Vous ne remarquez pas comme votre fille est pâle.

HÉRODIAS

Qu'est-ce que cela vous fait qu'elle soit pâle ou non ?

HÉRODE

Jamais je ne l'ai vue si pâle.

HÉRODIAS

Il ne faut pas la regarder.

LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

En ce jour-là le soleil deviendra noir comme un sac de poil, et la lune deviendra comme du sang, et les étoiles du ciel tomberont sur la terre comme les figues vertes tombent d'un figuier, et les rois de la terre auront peur.

HÉRODIAS

Ah ! Ah ! Je voudrais bien voir ce jour dont il parle, où la lune deviendra comme du sang et où les étoiles tomberont sur la terre comme des figues vertes. Ce prophète parle comme un homme ivre . . . Mais je ne peux pas souffrir le son de sa voix. Je déteste sa voix. Ordonnez qu'il se taise.

HÉRODE

Mais non. Je ne comprends pas ce qu'il a dit. mais cela peut être un présage.

HÉRODIAS

Je ne crois pas aux présages. Il parle comme un homme ivre.

HÉRODE

Peut-être qu'il est ivre du vin de Dieu!

HÉRODIAS

Quel vin est-ce, le vin de Dieu? De quelles vignes vient-il? Dans quel pressoir peut-on le trouver?

HÉRODE [*Il ne quitte plus Salomé du regard.*]

Tigellin, quand tu as été à Rome dernièrement, est-ce que l'empereur t'a parlé au sujet . . . ?

TIGELLIN

A quel sujet, Seigneur?

HÉRODE

A quel sujet? Ah! je vous ai adressé une question, n'est-ce pas? J'ai oublié ce que je voulais savoir.

HÉRODIAS

Vous regardez encore ma fille. Il ne faut pas la regarder. Je vous ai déjà dit cela.

HÉRODE

Vous ne dites que cela.

HÉRODIAS

Je le redis.

HÉRODE

Et la restauration du temple dont on a tant parlé ? Est-ce qu'on va faire quelque chose ? On dit, n'est-ce pas, que le voile du sanctuaire a disparu ?

HÉRODIAS

C'est toi qui l'a pris. Tu parles à tort et à travers. Je ne veux pas rester ici. Rentrons.

HÉRODE

Salomé, dansez pour moi.

HÉRODIAS

Je ne veux pas qu'elle danse.

SALOMÉ

Je n'ai aucune envie de danser, tétrarque.

HÉRODE

Salomé, fille d'Hérodias, dansez pour moi.

HÉRODIAS

Laissez la tranquille.

HÉRODE

Je vous ordonne de danser, Salomé.

SALOMÉ

Je ne danserai pas, tétrarque.

HÉRODIAS [*riant*]

Voilà comme elle vous obéit !

HÉRODE

Qu'est-ce que cela me fait qu'elle danse ou non ? Cela ne me fait rien. Je suis heureux ce soir. Je suis très heureux. Jamais je n'ai été si heureux.

LE PREMIER SOLDAT

Il a l'air sombre, le tétrarque. N'est-ce pas qu'il a l'air sombre ?

LE SECOND SOLDAT

Il a l'air sombre.

HÉRODE

Pourquoi ne serais-je pas heureux ? César, qui est le maître du monde, qui est le maître de tout, m'aime beaucoup. Il vient de m'envoyer des cadeaux de grande valeur. Aussi il m'a promis de citer à Rome le roi de Cappadoce qui est mon ennemi. Peut-être à Rome il le crucifiera. Il peut faire tout ce qu'il veut, César. Enfin, il est le maître. Ainsi, vous voyez, j'ai le droit d'être heureux. Il n'y a rien au monde qui puisse gâter mon plaisir.

LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

Il sera assis sur son trône. Il sera vêtu de pourpre et d'écarlate. Dans sa main il portera un vase d'or plein de ses blasphèmes. Et l'ange du Seigneur Dieu le frappera. Il sera mangé des vers.

HÉRODIAS

Vous entendez ce qu'il dit de vous. Il dit que vous serez mangé des vers.

HÉRODE

Ce n'est pas de moi qu'il parle. Il ne dit jamais rien contre moi. C'est du roi de Cappadoce qu'il parle, du roi de Cappadoce qui est mon ennemi. C'est celui-là qui sera mangé des vers. Ce n'est pas moi. Jamais il n'a rien dit contre moi, le prophète, sauf que j'ai eu tort de prendre comme épouse l'épouse de mon frère. Peut-être a-t-il raison. En effet, vous êtes stérile.

HÉRODIAS

Je suis stérile, moi. Et vous dites cela, vous qui regardez toujours ma fille, vous qui avez voulu la faire danser pour votre plaisir. C'est ridicule de dire cela. Moi j'ai eu un enfant. Vous n'avez jamais eu d'enfant,

même d'une de vos esclaves. C'est vous qui êtes stérile, ce n'est pas moi.

HÉRODE

Taisez-vous. Je vous dis que vous êtes stérile. Vous ne m'avez pas donné d'enfant, et le prophète dit que notre mariage n'est pas un vrai mariage. Il dit que c'est un mariage incestueux, un mariage qui apportera des malheurs . . . J'ai peur qu'il n'ait raison. Je suis sûr qu'il a raison. Mais ce n'est pas le moment de parler de ces choses. En ce moment-ci je veux être heureux. Au fait je le suis. Je suis très heureux. Il n'y a rien qui me manque.

HÉRODIAS

Je suis bien contente que vous soyez de si belle humeur, ce soir. Ce n'est pas dans vos habitudes. Mais il est tard. Rentrons. Vous n'oubliez pas qu'au lever du soleil nous allons tous à la chasse. Aux ambassadeurs de César il faut faire tout honneur, n'est-ce pas ?

LE SECOND SOLDAT

Comme il a l'air sombre, le tétrarque.

LE PREMIER SOLDAT
Oui, il a l'air sombre.

HÉRODE
Salomé, Salomé, dansez pour moi. Je vous supplie de danser pour moi. Ce soir je suis triste. Oui, je suis très triste ce soir. Quand je suis entré ici, j'ai glissé dans le sang, ce qui est d'un mauvais présage, et j'ai entendu, je suis sûr que j'ai entendu un battement d'ailes dans l'air, un battement d'ailes gigantesques. Je ne sais pas ce que cela veut dire . . . Je suis triste ce soir. Ainsi dansez pour moi. Dansez pour moi, Salomé, je vous supplie. Si vous dansez pour moi vous pourrez me demander tout ce que vous voudrez et je vous le donnerai. Oui, dansez pour moi, Salomé, et je vous donnerai tout ce que vous me demanderez, fût-ce la moitié de mon royaume.

SALOMÉ [*se levant*]
Vous me donnerez tout ce que je demanderai, tétrarque ?

HÉRODIAS
Ne dansez pas, ma fille.

HÉRODE

Tout, fût-ce la moitié de mon royaume.

SALOMÉ

Vous le jurez, tétrarque?

HÉRODE

Je le jure, Salomé.

HÉRODIAS

Ma fille, ne dansez pas.

SALOMÉ

Sur quoi jurez-vous, tétrarque?

HÉRODE

Sur ma vie, sur ma couronne, sur mes dieux. Tout ce que vous voudrez je vous le donnerai, fût-ce la moitié de mon royaume, si vous dansez pour moi. Oh! Salomé, Salomé, dansez pour moi.

SALOMÉ

Vous avez juré, tétrarque.

HÉRODE

J'ai juré, Salomé.

SALOMÉ

Tout ce que je vous demanderai, fût-ce la moitié de votre royaume?

HÉRODIAS

Ne dansez pas, ma fille.

HÉRODE

Fût-ce la moitié de mon royaume. Comme reine, tu serais très belle, Salomé, s'il te plaisait de demander la moitié de mon royaume. N'est-ce pas qu'elle serait très belle comme reine? . . . Ah! il fait froid ici! il y a un vent très froid, et j'entends . . . pourquoi est-ce que j'entends dans l'air ce battement d'ailes? Oh! on dirait qu'il y a un oiseau, un grand oiseau noir, qui plane sur la terrasse. Pourquoi est-ce que je ne peux pas le voir, cet oiseau? Le battement de ses ailes est terrible. Le vent qui vient de ses ailes est terrible. C'est un vent froid . . . Mais non, il ne fait pas froid du tout. Au contraire, il fait très chaud. Il fait trop chaud. J'étouffe. Versez-moi l'eau sur les mains. Donnez-moi de la neige à manger. Dégrafez mon manteau. Vite, vite, dégrafez mon manteau . . . Non. Laissez-le. C'est ma couronne qui me fait mal, ma couronne de roses. On dirait que ces fleurs sont faites de feu. Elles ont brûlé mon front. [*Il arrache de sa tête la*

couronne, et la jette sur la table.] Ah! enfin, je respire. Comme ils sont rouges ces pétales! On dirait des taches de sang sur la nappe. Cela ne fait rien. Il ne faut pas trouver des symboles dans chaque chose qu'on voit. Cela rend la vie impossible. Il serait mieux de dire que les taches de sang sont aussi belles que les pétales de roses. Il serait beaucoup mieux de dire cela . . . Mais ne parlons pas de cela. Maintenant je suis heureux. Je suis très heureux. J'ai le droit d'être heureux, n'est-ce pas? Votre fille va danser pour moi. N'est-ce pas que vous allez danser pour moi, Salomé? Vous avez promis de danser pour moi.

HÉRODIAS

Je ne veux pas qu'elle danse.

SALOMÉ

Je danserai pour vous, tétrarque.

HÉRODE

Vous entendez ce que dit votre fille. Elle va danser pour moi. Vous avez bien raison, Salomé, de danser pour moi. Et, après que vous aurez dansé n'oubliez pas de me demander tout ce que vous voudrez. Tout ce que vous

voudrez je vous le donnerai, fût-ce la moitié de mon royaume. J'ai juré, n'est-ce pas?

SALOMÉ.

Vous avez juré, tétrarque.

HÉRODE.

Et je n'ai jamais manqué à ma parole. Je ne suis pas de ceux qui manquent à leur parole. Je ne sais pas mentir. Je suis l'esclave de ma parole, et ma parole c'est la parole d'un roi. Le roi de Cappadoce ment toujours, mais ce n'est pas un vrai roi. C'est un lâche. Aussi il me doit de l'argent qu'il ne veut pas payer. Il a même insulté mes ambassadeurs. Il a dit des choses très blessantes. Mais César le crucifiera quand il viendra à Rome. Je suis sûr que César le crucifiera. Sinon il mourra mangé des vers. Le prophète l'a prédit. Eh bien! Salomé, qu'attendez-vous?

SALOMÉ.

J'attends que mes esclaves m'apportent des parfums et les sept voiles et m'ôtent mes sandales.

[*Les esclaves apportent des parfums et les sept voiles et ôtent les sandales de Salomé.*]

HÉRODE

Ah! vous allez danser pieds nus! C'est bien! C'est bien! Vos petits pieds seront comme des colombes blanches. Ils ressembleront à des petites fleurs blanches qui dansent sur un arbre . . . Ah! non. Elle va danser dans le sang! Il y a du sang par terre. Je ne veux pas qu'elle danse dans le sang. Ce serait d'un très mauvais présage.

HÉRODIAS

Qu'est-ce que cela vous fait qu'elle danse dans le sang? Vous avez bien marché dedans, vous . . .

HÉRODE

Qu'est-ce que cela me fait? Ah! regardez la lune! Elle est devenue rouge. Elle est devenue rouge comme du sang. Ah! le prophète l'a bien prédit. Il a prédit que la lune deviendrait rouge comme du sang. N'est-ce pas qu'il a prédit cela? Vous l'avez tous entendu. La lune est devenue rouge comme du sang. Ne le voyez-vous pas?

HÉRODIAS

Je le vois bien, et les étoiles tombent comme des figues vertes, n'est-ce pas? Et le soleil

devient noir comme un sac de poil, et les rois de la terre ont peur. Cela au moins on le voit. Pour une fois dans sa vie le prophète a eu raison. Les rois de la terre ont peur. . . . Enfin, rentrons. Vous êtes malade. On va dire à Rome que vous êtes fou. Rentrons, je vous dis.

LA VOIX D'IOKANAAN

Qui est celui qui vient d'Edom, qui vient de Bosra avec sa robe teinte de pourpre; qui éclate dans la beauté de ses vêtements, et qui marche avec une force toute puissante? Pourquoi vos vêtements sont-ils teints d'écarlate?

HÉRODIAS.

Rentrons. La voix de cet homme m'exaspère. Je ne veux pas que ma fille danse pendant qu'il crie comme cela. Je ne veux pas qu'elle danse pendant que vous la regardez comme cela. Enfin, je ne veux pas qu'elle danse.

HÉRODE

Ne te lève pas, mon épouse, ma reine, c'est inutile. Je ne rentrerai pas avant qu'elle ait dansé. Dansez, Salomé, dansez pour moi.

HÉRODIAS

Ne dansez pas, ma fille.

SALOMÉ

Je suis prête, tétrarque.

[*Salomé danse la danse des sept voiles.*]

HÉRODE

Ah! c'est magnifique, c'est magnifique! Vous voyez qu'elle a dansé pour moi, votre fille. Approchez, Salomé! Approchez afin que je puisse vous donner votre salaire. Ah! je paie bien les danseuses, moi. Toi, je te paierai bien. Je te donnerai tout ce que tu voudras. Que veux-tu, dis?

SALOMÉ [*s'agenouillant*]

Je veux qu'on m'apporte présentement dans un bassin d'argent . . .

HÉRODE [*riant*]

Dans un bassin d'argent? mais oui, dans un bassin d'argent, certainement. Elle est charmante, n'est-ce pas? Qu'est-ce que vous voulez qu'on vous apporte dans un bassin d'argent, ma chère et belle Salomé, vous qui êtes la plus belle de toutes les filles de Judée? Qu'est-ce que vous voulez qu'on vous apporte

dans un bassin d'argent? Dites-moi. Quoi que cela puisse être on vous le donnera. Mes trésors vous appartiennent. Qu'est-ce que c'est, Salomé?

SALOMÉ [*se levant*]

La tête d'Iokanaan.

HÉRODIAS.

Ah! c'est bien dit, ma fille.

HÉRODE

Non, non.

HÉRODIAS

C'est bien dit, ma fille.

HÉRODE

Non, non, Salomé. Vous ne me demandez pas cela. N'écoutez pas votre mère. Elle vous donne toujours de mauvais conseils. Il ne faut pas l'écouter.

SALOMÉ

Je n'écoute pas ma mère. C'est pour mon propre plaisir que je demande la tête d'Iokanaan dans un bassin d'argent. Vous avez juré, Hérode. N'oubliez pas que vous avez juré.

HÉRODE

Je le sais. J'ai juré par mes dieux. Je le sais bien. Mais je vous supplie, Salomé, de me demander autre chose. Demandez-moi la moitié de mon royaume, et je vous la donnerai. Mais ne me demandez pas ce que vous m'avez demandé.

SALOMÉ

Je vous demande la tête d'Iokanaan.

HÉRODE

Non, non, je ne veux pas.

SALOMÉ

Vous avez juré, Hérode.

HÉRODIAS

Oui, vous avez juré. Tout le monde vous a entendu. Vous avez juré devant tout le monde.

HÉRODE

Taisez-vous. Ce n'est pas à vous que je parle.

HÉRODIAS

Ma fille a bien raison de demander la tête de cet homme. Il a vomi des insultes contre moi. Il a dit des choses monstrueuses contre

moi. On voit qu'elle aime beaucoup sa mère Ne cédez pas, ma fille. Il a juré, il a juré.

HÉRODE

Taisez-vous. Ne me parlez pas . . . Voyons, Salomé, il faut être raisonnable, n'est-ce pas ? N'est-ce pas qu'il faut être raisonnable ? Je n'ai jamais été dur envers vous. Je vous ai toujours aimée . . . Peut-être, je vous ai trop aimée. Ainsi, ne me demandez pas cela. C'est horrible, c'est épouvantable de me demander cela. Au fond, je ne crois pas que vous soyez sérieuse. La tête d'un homme décapité, c'est une chose laide, n'est-ce pas ? Ce n'est pas une chose qu'une vierge doive regarder. Quel plaisir cela pourrait-il vous donner ? Aucun. Non, non, vous ne voulez pas cela . . . Écoutez-moi un instant. J'ai une émeraude, une grande émeraude ronde que le favori de César m'a envoyée. Si vous regardiez à travers cette émeraude vous pourriez voir des choses qui se passent à une distance immense. César lui-même en porte une tout à fait pareille quand il va au cirque. Mais la mienne est plus grande. C'est la plus grande émeraude du monde. N'est-ce pas

que vous voulez cela ? Demandez-moi cela et je vous le donnerai.

SALOMÉ

Je demande la tête d'Iokanaan.

HÉRODE

Vous ne m'écoutez pas, vous ne m'écoutez pas. Enfin, laissez-moi parler, Salomé.

SALOMÉ

La tête d'Iokanaan.

HÉRODE

Non, non, vous ne voulez pas cela. Vous me dites cela seulement pour me faire de la peine, parce que je vous ai regardée pendant toute la soirée. Eh ! bien, oui. Je vous ai regardée pendant toute la soirée. Votre beauté m'a troublé. Votre beauté m'a terriblement troublé, et je vous ai trop regardée. Mais je ne le ferai plus. Il ne faut regarder ni les choses ni les personnes. Il ne faut regarder que dans les miroirs. Car les miroirs ne nous montrent que des masques . . . Oh ! oh ! du vin ! j'ai soif . . . Salomé, Salomé, soyons amis. Enfin, voyez . . . Qu'est-ce que je voulais dire ? Qu'est-ce que c'était ? Ah ! je m'en souviens ! . . . Salomé ! Non, venez plus

près de moi. J'ai peur que vous ne m'entendiez pas . . . Salomé, vous connaissez mes paons blancs, mes beaux paons blancs, qui se promènent dans le jardin entre les myrtes et les grands cyprès. Leurs becs sont dorés, et les grains qu'ils mangent sont dorés aussi, et leurs pieds sont teints de pourpre. La pluie vient quand ils crient, et quand ils se pavanent la lune se montre au ciel. Ils vont deux à deux entre les cyprès et les myrtes noirs et chacun a son esclave pour le soigner. Quelquefois ils volent à travers les arbres, et quelquefois ils couchent sur le gazon et autour de l'étang. Il n'y a pas dans le monde d'oiseaux si merveilleux. Il n'y aucun roi du monde qui possède des oiseaux aussi merveilleux. Je suis sûr que même César ne possède pas d'oiseaux aussi beaux. Eh bien ! je vous donnerai cinquante de mes paons. Ils vous suivront partout, et au milieu d'eux vous serez comme la lune dans un grand nuage blanc . . . Je vous les donnerai tous. Je n'en ai que cent, et il n'y a aucun roi du monde qui possède des paons comme les miens, mais je vous les donnerai tous. Seulement, il faut me délier de ma

parole et ne pas me demander ce que vous m'avez demandé. [*Il vide la coupe de vin.*]

SALOMÉ

Donnez-moi la tête d'Iokanaan.

HÉRODIAS

C'est bien dit, ma fille! Vous, vous êtes ridicule avec vos paons.

HÉRODE

Taisez-vous. Vous criez toujours. Vous criez comme une bête de proie. Il ne faut pas crier comme cela. Votre voix m'ennuie. Taisez-vous, je vous dis . . . Salomé, pensez à ce que vous faites. Cet homme vient peut-être de Dieu. Je suis sûr qu'il vient de Dieu. C'est un saint homme. Le doigt de Dieu l'a touché. Dieu a mis dans sa bouche des mots terribles. Dans le palais, comme dans le désert, Dieu est toujours avec lui . . . Au moins, c'est possible. On ne sait pas, mais il est possible que Dieu soit pour lui et avec lui. Aussi peut-être que s'il mourrait, il m'arriverait un malheur. Enfin, il a dit que le jour où il mourrait il arriverait un malheur à quelqu'un. Ce ne peut être qu'à moi. Souvenez-vous, j'ai glissé dans le sang

quand je suis entré ici. Aussi j'ai entendu un battement d'ailes dans l'air, un battement d'ailes gigantesques. Ce sont de très mauvais présages. Et il y en avait d'autres. Je suis sûr qu'il y en avait d'autres, quoique je ne les aie pas vus. Eh bien! Salomé, vous ne voulez pas qu'un malheur m'arrive? Vous ne voulez pas cela. Enfin, écoutez-moi.

SALOMÉ

Donnez-moi la tête d'Iokanaan.

HÉRODE

Vous voyez, vous ne m'écoutez pas. Mais soyez calme. Moi, je suis très calme. Je suis tout à fait calme. Écoutez. J'ai des bijoux cachés ici que même votre mère n'a jamais vus, des bijoux tout à fait extraordinaires. J'ai un collier de perles à quatre rangs. On dirait des lunes enchaînées de rayons d'argent. On dirait cinquante lunes captives dans un filet d'or. Une reine l'a porté sur l'ivoire de ses seins. Toi, quand tu le porteras, tu seras aussi belle qu'une reine. J'ai des améthystes de deux espèces. Une qui est noire comme le vin. L'autre qui est rouge comme du vin qu'on a coloré avec de l'eau. J'ai des topazes

jaunes comme les yeux des tigres, et des topazes roses comme les yeux des pigeons, et des topazes vertes comme les yeux des chats. J'ai des opales qui brûlent toujours avec une flamme qui est très froide, des opales qui attristent les esprits et ont peur des ténèbres. J'ai des onyx semblables aux prunelles d'une morte. J'ai des sélénites qui changent quand la lune change et deviennent pâles quand elles voient le soleil. J'ai des saphirs grands comme des œufs et bleus comme des fleurs bleues. La mer erre dedans, et la lune ne vient jamais troubler le bleu de ses flots. J'ai des chrysolithes et des béryls, j'ai des chrysoprases et des rubis, j'ai des sardonyx et des hyacinthes, et des calcédoines et je vous les donnerai tous, mais tous, et j'ajouterai d'autres choses. Le roi des Indes vient justement de m'envoyer quatre éventails faits de plumes de perroquets, et le roi de Numidie une robe faite de plumes d'autruche. J'ai un cristal qu'il n'est pas permis aux femmes de voir et que même les jeunes hommes ne doivent regarder qu'après avoir été flagellés de verges. Dans un coffret de nacre j'ai trois turquoises merveilleuses. Quand on les porte sur le front on peut

imaginer des choses qui n'existent pas, et quand on les porte dans la main on peut rendre les femmes stériles. Ce sont des trésors de grande valeur. Ce sont des trésors sans prix. Et ce n'est pas tout. Dans un coffret d'ébène j'ai deux coupes d'ambre qui ressemblent à des pommes d'or. Si un ennemi verse du poison dans ces coupes elles deviennent comme des pommes d'argent. Dans un coffret incrusté d'ambre j'ai des sandales incrustées de verre. J'ai des manteaux qui viennent du pays des Sères et des bracelets garnis d'escarboucles et de jade qui viennent de la ville d'Euphrate . . . Enfin, que veux-tu, Salomé? Dis-moi ce que tu désires et je te le donnerai. Je te donnerai tout ce que tu demanderas, sauf une chose. Je te donnerai tout ce que je possède, sauf une vie. Je te donnerai le manteau du grand prêtre. Je te donnerai le voile du sanctuaire.

LES JUIFS
Oh! Oh!

SALOMÉ
Donne-moi la tête d'Iokanaan.

HÉRODE [*s'affaissant sur son siège*]

Qu'on lui donne ce qu'elle demande! C'est bien la fille de sa mère! [*Le premier soldat s'approche. Hérodias prend de la main du tétrarque la bague de la mort et la donne au soldat qui l'apporte immédiatement au bourreau. Le bourreau a l'air effaré.*] Qui a pris ma bague? Il y avait une bague à ma main droite. Qui a bu mon vin! Il y avait du vin dans ma coupe. Elle était pleine de vin. Quelqu'un l'a bu? Oh! je suis sûr qu'il va arriver un malheur à quelqu'un. [*Le bourreau descend dans la citerne.*] Ah! pourquoi ai-je donné ma parole? Les rois ne doivent jamais donner leur parole. S'ils ne la gardent pas, c'est terrible. S'ils la gardent, c'est terrible aussi . . .

HÉRODIAS

Je trouve que ma fille a bien fait.

HÉRODE

Je suis sûr qu'il va arriver un malheur.

SALOMÉ [*Elle se penche sur la citerne et écoute.*]

Il n'y a pas de bruit. Je n'entends rien. Pourquoi ne crie-t-il pas, cet homme? Ah!

si quelqu'un cherchait à me tuer, je crierais, je me débattrais, je ne voudrais pas souffrir . . . Frappe, frappe, Naaman. Frappe, je te dis . . . Non. Je n'entends rien. Il y a un silence affreux. Ah ! quelque chose est tombé par terre. J'ai entendu quelque chose tomber. C'était l'épée du bourreau. Il a peur, cet esclave ! Il a laissé tomber son épée. Il n'ose pas le tuer. C'est un lâche, cet esclave ! Il faut envoyer des soldats. [*Elle voit le page d'Hérodias et s'adresse à lui.*] Viens ici. Tu as été l'ami de celui qui est mort, n'est-ce pas ? Eh bien, il n'y a pas eu assez de morts. Dites aux soldats qu'ils descendent et m'apportent ce que je demande, ce que le tétrarque m'a promis, ce qui m'appartient. [*Le page recule. Elle s'adresse aux soldats.*] Venez ici, soldats. Descendez dans cette citerne, et apportez-moi la tête de cet homme. [*Les soldats reculent.*] Tétrarque, tétrarque, commandez à vos soldats de m'apporter la tête d'Iokanaan. [*Un grand bras noir, le bras du bourreau, sort de la citerne apportant sur un bouclier d'argent la tête d'Iokanaan. Salomé la saisit. Hérode se cache le visage avec son manteau. Hérodias sourit et s'évente. Les*

Nazaréens s'agenouillent et commencent à prier.] Ah ! tu n'as pas voulu me laisser baiser ta bouche, Iokanaan. Eh bien ! je la baiserai maintenant. Je la mordrai avec mes dents comme on mord un fruit mûr. Oui, je baiserai ta bouche, Iokanaan. Je te l'ai dit, n'est-ce pas ? je te l'ai dit. Eh bien ! je la baiserai maintenant . . . Mais pourquoi ne me regardes-tu pas, Iokanaan ? Tes yeux qui étaient si terribles, qui étaient si pleins de colère et de mépris, ils sont fermés ? Ouvre tes yeux ! Soulève tes paupières, Iokanaan. Pourquoi ne me regardes-tu pas ? As-tu peur de moi, Iokanaan, que tu ne veux pas me regarder ? . . . Et ta langue qui était comme un serpent rouge dardant des poisons, elle ne remue plus, elle ne dit rien maintenant, Iokanaan, cette vipère rouge qui a vomi son venin sur moi. C'est étrange, n'est-ce pas ? Comment se fait-il que la vipère rouge ne remue plus ? . . . Tu n'as pas voulu de moi, Iokanaan. Tu m'as rejetée. Tu m'as dit des choses infâmes. Tu m'as traitée comme une courtisane, comme une prostituée, moi, Salomé, fille d'Hérodias, Princesse de Judée ! Eh bien, Iokanaan, moi

je vis encore, mais toi tu es mort et ta tête m'appartient. Je puis en faire ce que je veux. Je puis la jeter aux chiens et aux oiseaux de l'air. Ce que laisseront les chiens, les oiseaux de l'air le mangeront . . . Ah ! Iokanaan, Iokanaan, tu as été le seul homme que j'ai aimé. Tous les autres hommes m'inspirent du dégoût. Mais, toi, tu étais beau. Ton corps était une colonne d'ivoire sur un socle d'argent. C'était un jardin plein de colombes et de lis d'argent. C'était une tour d'argent ornée de boucliers d'ivoire. Il n'y avait rien au monde d'aussi blanc que ton corps. Il n'y avait rien au monde d'aussi noir que tes cheveux. Dans le monde tout entier il n'y avait rien d'aussi rouge que ta bouche. Ta voix était un encensoir qui répandait d'étranges parfums, et quand je te regardais j'entendais une musique étrange ! Ah ! pourquoi ne m'as-tu pas regardée, Iokanaan ? Derrière tes mains et tes blasphèmes tu as caché ton visage. Tu as mis sur tes yeux le bandeau de celui qui veut voir son Dieu. Eh bien, tu l'as vu, ton Dieu, Iokanaan, mais moi, moi . . . tu ne m'as jamais vue. Si tu m'avais vue, tu m'aurais aimée. Moi, je t'ai vu, Iokanaan, et je t'ai

aimé. Oh! comme je t'ai aimé. Je t'aime encore, Iokanaan. Je n'aime que toi . . . J'ai soif de ta beauté. J'ai faim de ton corps. Et ni le vin, ni les fruits ne peuvent apaiser mon désir. Que ferai-je, Iokanaan, maintenant? Ni les fleuves ni les grandes eaux, ne pourraient éteindre ma passion. J'étais une Princesse, tu m'as dédaignée. J'étais une vierge, tu m'as déflorée. J'étais chaste, tu as rempli mes veines de feu . . . Ah! Ah! pourquoi ne m'as-tu pas regardée, Iokanaan? Si tu m'avais regardée, tu m'aurais aimée. Je sais bien que tu m'aurais aimée, et le mystère de l'amour est plus grand que le mystère de la mort. Il ne faut regarder que l'amour.

HÉRODE

Elle est monstrueuse, ta fille, elle est tout à fait monstrueuse. Enfin, ce qu'elle a fait est un grand crime. Je suis sûr que c'est un crime contre un Dieu inconnu.

HÉRODIAS

J'approuve ce que ma fille a fait, et je veux rester ici maintenant.

HÉRODE [*se levant*]

Ah! l'épouse incestueuse qui parle! Viens!

Je ne veux pas rester ici. Viens, je te dis. Je suis sûr qu'il va arriver un malheur. Manasse, Issachar, Ozias, éteignez les flambeaux. Je ne veux pas regarder les choses. Je ne veux pas que les choses me regardent. Éteignez les flambeaux. Cachez la lune! Cachez les étoiles! Cachons-nous dans notre palais, Hérodias. Je commence à avoir peur.

[*Les esclaves éteignent les flambeaux. Les étoiles disparaissent. Un grand nuage noir passe à travers la lune et la cache complètement. La scène devient tout à fait sombre. Le tétrarque commence à monter l'escalier.*]

LA VOIX DE SALOMÉ

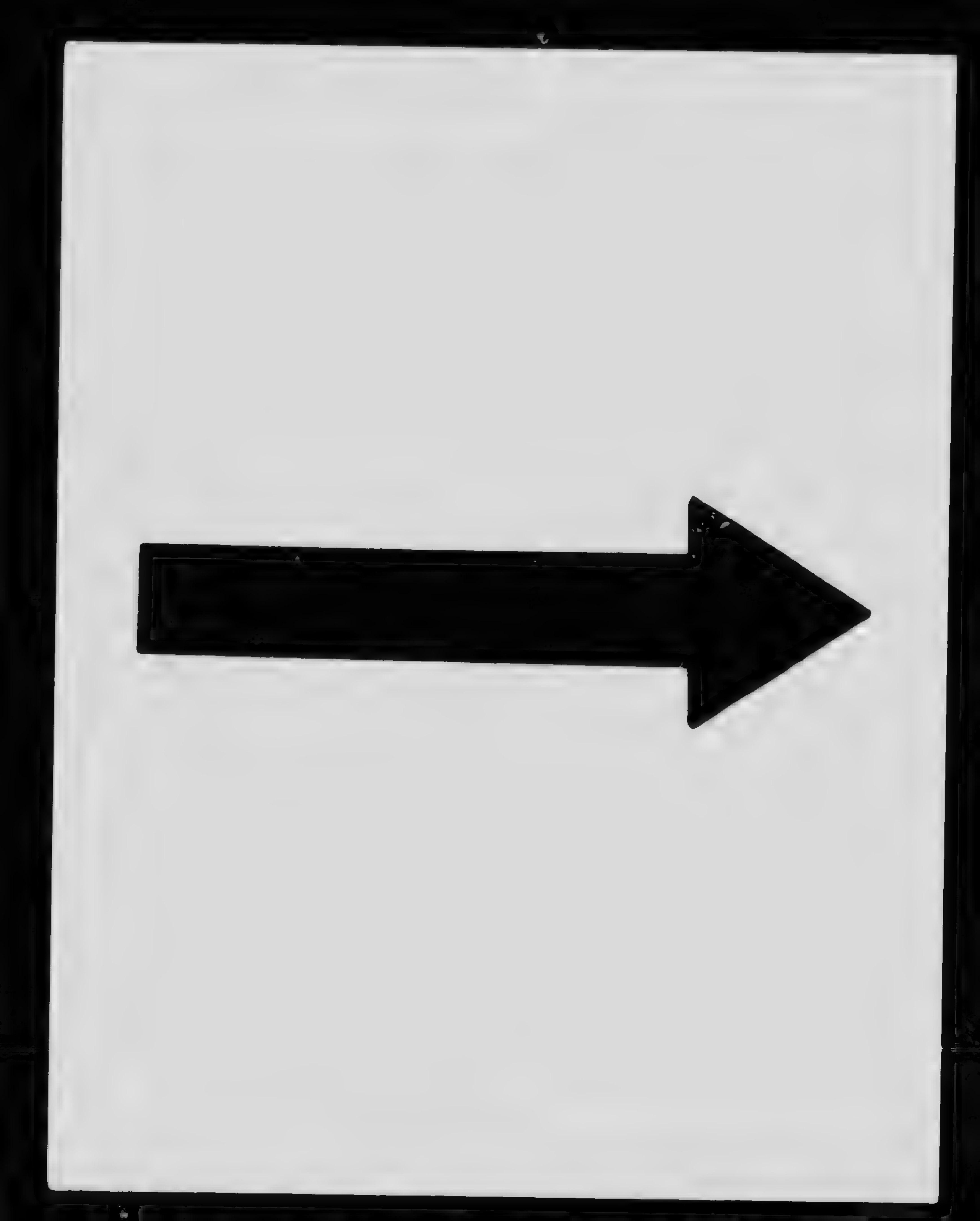
Ah! j'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan, j'ai baisé ta bouche. Il y avait une âcre saveur sur tes lèvres. Était-ce la saveur du sang? . . . Mais, peut-être est-ce la saveur de l'amour. On dit que l'amour a une âcre saveur . . . Mais, qu'importe? Qu'importe? J'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan, j'ai baisé ta bouche.

[*Un rayon de lune tombe sur Salomé et l'éclaire.*]

HÉRODE [*se retournant et voyant Salomé*]
Tuez cette femme !
[*Les soldats s'élancent et écrasent sous leurs boucliers Salomé, fille d'Hérodias, Princesse de Judée.*]

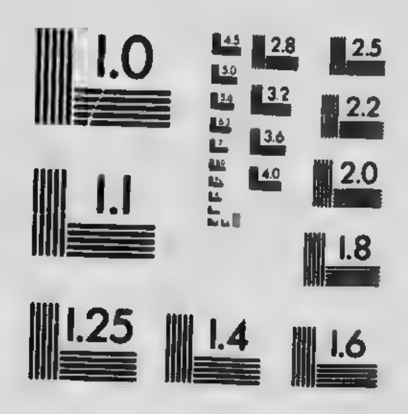
FIN

A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY



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This play is only a fragment and was never completed. The well-known poet, Mr. T. Sturge Moore, has written an opening scene for the purposes of presentation, but only Oscar Wilde's work is given here.

A private performance was given by the Literary Theatre Club in 1906. The first public presentation was given by the New English Players at The Cripplegate Institute, Golden Lane, E.C., in 1907. German, French, and Hungarian translations have been presented on the Continental stage.

Now issued for the first time, 1907.

A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

[*Enter* THE HUSBAND]

SIMONE

My good wife, you come slowly, were it not better
To run to meet your lord? Here, take my cloak.
Take this pack first. 'Tis heavy. I have sold nothing:
Save a furred robe unto the Cardinal's son,
Who hopes to wear it when his father dies,
And hopes that will be soon.
But who is this?
Why you have here some friend. Some kinsman doubtless,
Newly returned from foreign lands and fallen
Upon a house without a host to greet him?
I crave your pardon, kinsman. For a house
Lacking a host is but an empty thing
And void of honour; a cup without its wine,
A scabbard without steel to keep it straight.

A flowerless garden widowed of the sun.
Again I crave your pardon, my sweet cousin.

BIANCA

This is no kinsman and no cousin neither.

SIMONE

No kinsman, and no cousin! You amaze me.
Who is it then who with such courtly grace
Deigns to accept our hospitalities?

GUIDO

My name is Guido Bardi.

SIMONE

What! The son
Of that great Lord of Florence whose dim towers
Like shadows silvered by the wandering moon
I see from out my casement every night!
Sir Guido Bardi, you are welcome here,
Twice welcome. For I trust my honest wife,
Most honest if uncomely to the eye,
Hath not with foolish chatterings wearied you,
As is the wont of women.

GUIDO

Your gracious lady,
Whose beauty is a lamp that pales the stars
And robs Diana's quiver of her beams
Has welcomed me with such sweet courtesies
That if it be her pleasure, and your own,
I will come often to your simple house.
And when your business bids you walk abroad
I will sit here and charm her loneliness
Lest she might sorrow for you overmuch.
What say you, good Simone?

SIMONE

My noble Lord,
You bring me such high honour that my tongue
Like a slave's tongue is tied, and cannot say
The word it would. Yet not to give you thanks
Were to be too unmannerly. So, I thank you,
From my heart's core.

It is such things as these
That knit a state together, when a Prince
So nobly born and of such fair address,
Forgetting unjust Fortune's differences,

Comes to an honest burgher's honest home
As a most honest friend.
And yet, my Lord,
I fear I am too bold. Some other night
We trust that you will come here as a friend,
To-night you come to buy my merchandise.
Is it not so? Silks, velvets, what you will,
I doubt not but I have some dainty wares
Will woo your fancy. True, the hour is late,
But we poor merchants toil both night and day
To make our scanty gains. The tolls are high,
And every city levies its own toll,
And prentices are unskilful, and wives even
Lack sense and cunning, though Bianca here
Has brought me a rich customer to-night.
Is it not so, Bianca? But I waste time.
Where is my pack? Where is my pack, I say?
Open it, my good wife. Unloose the cords.
Kneel down upon the floor. You are better so.
Nay not that one, the other. Despatch, despatch!
Buyers will grow impatient oftentimes.
We dare not keep them waiting. Ay! 'tis that,

Give it to me; with care. It is most costly.
Touch it with care. And now, my noble Lord—
Nay, pardon, I have here a Lucca damask,
The very web of silver and the roses
So cunningly wrought that they lack perfume merely
To cheat the wanton sense. Touch it, my Lord.
Is it not soft as water, strong as steel?
And then the roses! Are they not finely woven?
I think the hillsides that best love the rose,
At Bellosguardo or at Fiesole,
Throw no such blossoms on the lap of spring,
Or if they do their blossoms droop and die.
Such is the fate of all the dainty things
That dance in wind and water. Nature herself
Makes war on her own loveliness and slays
Her children like Medea. Nay but, my Lord,
Look closer still. Why in this damask here
It is summer always, and no winter's tooth
Will ever blight these blossoms. For every ell
I paid a piece of gold. Red gold, and good,
The fruit of careful thrift.

GUIDO

Honest Simone,
Enough, I pray you. I am well content,
To-morrow I will send my servant to you,
Who will pay twice your price.

SIMONE

My generous Prince!
I kiss your hands. And now I do remember
Another treasure hidden in my house
Which you must see. It is a robe of state:
Woven by a Venetian: the stuff, cut-velvet:
The pattern, pomegranates: each separate seed
Wrought of a pearl: the collar all of pearls,
As thick as moths in summer streets at night,
And whiter than the moons that madmen see
Through prison bars at morning. A male ruby
Burns like a lighted coal within the clasp.
The Holy Father has not such a stone,
Nor could the Indies show a brother to it.
The brooch itself is of most curious art,
Cellini never made a fairer thing
To please the great Lorenzo. You must wear it.
There is none worthier in our city here,
And it will suit you well. Upon one side

A slim and horned satyr leaps in gold
To catch some nymph of silver. Upon the
other
Stands Silence with a crystal in her hand,
No bigger than the smallest ear of corn,
That wavers at the passing of a bird,
And yet so cunningly wrought that one would
say
It breathed, or held its breath.

Worthy Bianca,
Would not this noble and most costly robe
Suit young Lord Guido well?

Nay, but entreat him;
He will refuse you nothing, though the price
Be as a prince's ransom. And your profit
Shall not be less than mine.

BIANCA

Am I your prentice?
Why should I chaffer for your velvet robe?

GUIDO

Nay, fair Bianca, I will buy the robe,
And all things that the honest merchant has
I will buy also. Princes must be ransomed,
And fortunate are all high lords who fall
Into the white hands of so fair a foe.

SIMONE

I stand rebuked. But you will buy my wares?
Will you not buy them? Fifty thousand crowns
Would scarce repay me. But you, my Lord,
shall have them
For forty thousand. Is that price too high?
Name your own price. I have a curious fancy
To see you in this wonder of the loom
Amidst the noble ladies of the court,
A flower among flowers.
They say, my lord,
These highborn dames do so affect your Grace
That where you go they throng like flies
around you,
Each seeking for your favour.
I have heard also
Of husbands that wear horns, and wear them
bravely,
A fashion most fantastical.

GUIDO

Simone,
Your reckless tongue needs curbing; and
besides,
You do forget this gracious lady here
Whose delicate ears are surely not attuned
To such coarse music.

SIMONE

True: I had forgotten,
Nor will offend again. Yet, my sweet Lord,
You 'll buy the robe of state. Will you not buy it?
But forty thousand crowns. 'Tis but a trifle,
To one who is Giovanni Bardi's heir.

GUIDO

Settle this thing to-morrow with my steward
Antonio Costa. He will come to you.
And you will have a hundred thousand crowns
If that will serve your purpose.

SIMONE

A hundred thousand!
Said you a hundred thousand? Oh! be sure
That will for all time, and in everything
Make me your debtor. Ay! from this time forth
My house, with everything my house contains
Is yours, and only yours.

A hundred thousand!
My brain is dazed. I will be richer far
Than all the other merchants. I will buy

Vineyards, and lands, and gardens. Every
loom
From Milan down to Sicily shall be mine,
And mine the pearls that the Arabian seas
Store in their silent caverns.
Generous Prince,
This night shall prove the herald of my love,
Which is so great that whatsoe'er you ask
It will not be denied you.

GUIDO

What if I asked
For white Bianca here?

SIMONE

You jest, my Lord,
She is not worthy of so great a Prince.
She is but made to keep the house and spin.
Is it not so, good wife? It is so. Look!
Your distaff waits for you. Sit down and
spin.
Women should not be idle in their homes,
For idle fingers make a thoughtless heart.
Sit down, I say.

BIANCA

What shall I spin?

SIMONE

Oh! spin
Some robe which, dyed in purple, sorrow might wear
For her own comforting: or some long-fringed cloth
In which a new-born and unwelcome babe
Might wail unheeded; or a dainty sheet
Which, delicately perfumed with sweet herbs,
Might serve to wrap a dead man. Spin what you will;
I care not, I.

BIANCA

The brittle thread is broken,
The dull wheel wearies of its ceaseless round,
The duller distaff sickens of its load;
I will not spin to-night.

SIMONE

It matters not.
To-morrow you shall spin, and every day
Shall find you at your distaff. So Lucretia
Was found by Tarquin. So, perchance, Lucretia
Waited for Tarquin. Who knows? I have heard

Strange things about men's wives. And now, my lord,
What news abroad? I heard to-day at Pisa
That certain of the English merchants there
Would sell their woollens at a lower rate
Than the just laws allow, and have entreated
The Signory to hear them.
Is this well?
Should merchant be to merchant as a wolf?
And should the stranger living in our land
Seek by enforced privilege or craft
To rob us of our profits?

GUIDO

What should I do
With merchants or their profits? Shall I go
And wrangle with the Signory on your count?
And wear the gown in which you buy from fools,
Or sell to sillier bidders? Honest Simone,
Wool-selling or wool-gathering is for you.
My wits have other quarries.

BIANCA

Noble Lord,
I pray you pardon my good husband here,
His soul stands ever in the market-place,

And his heart beats but at the price of wool.
Yet he is honest in his common way.
[*To* SIMONE]
And you, have you no shame? A gracious Prince
Comes to our house, and you must weary him
With most misplaced assurance. Ask his pardon.

SIMONE

I ask it humbly. We will talk to-night
Of other things. I hear the Holy Father
Has sent a letter to the King of France
Bidding him cross that shield of snow, the Alps,
And make a peace in Italy, which will be
Worse than war of brothers, and more bloody
Than civil rapine or intestine feuds.

GUIDO

Oh! we are weary of that King of France,
Who never comes, but ever talks of coming.
What are these things to me? There are other things
Closer, and of more import, good Simone.

BIANCA [*to* SIMONE]

I think you tire our most gracious guest.

What is the King of France to us? As much
As are your English merchants with their
wool.

. . . .

SIMONE

Is it so then? Is all this mighty world
Narrowed into the confines of this room
With but three souls for poor inhabitants?
Ay! there are times when the great universe,
Like cloth in some unskilful dyer's vat,
Shrivels into a handsbreadth, and perchance
That time is now! Well! let that time be
now.
Let this mean room be as that mighty stage
Whereon kings die, and our ignoble lives
Become the stakes God plays for.
I do not know
Why I speak thus. My ride has wearied me.
And my horse stumbled thrice, which is an
omen
That bodes not good to any.
Alas! my lord,
How poor a bargain is this life of man,
And in how mean a market are we sold!

When we are born our mothers weep, but
when
We die there is none weep for us. No, not
one. [*Passes to back of stage.*]

BIANCA

How like a common chapman does he speak!
I hate him, soul and body. Cowardice
Has set her pale seal on his brow. His hands
Whiter than poplar leaves in windy springs,
Shake with some palsy; and his stammering
mouth
Blurts out a foolish froth of empty words
Like water from a conduit.

GUIDO

Sweet Bianca,
He is not worthy of your thought or mine.
The man is but a very honest knave
Full of fine phrases for life's merchandise,
Selling most dear what he must hold most
cheap,
A windy brawler in a world of words.
I never met so eloquent a fool.

BIANCA

Oh, would that Death might take him where
he stands!

SIMONE [*turning round*]
Who spake of Death? Let no one speak of Death.
What should Death do in such a merry house,
With but a wife, a husband, and a friend
To give it greeting? Let Death go to houses
Where there are vile, adulterous things, chaste wives
Who growing weary of their noble lords
Draw back the curtains of their marriage beds,
And in polluted and dishonoured sheets
Feed some unlawful lust. Ay! 'tis so
Strange, and yet so. *You* do not know the world.
You are too single and too honourable.
I know it well. And would it were not so,
But wisdom comes with winters. My hair grows grey,
And youth has left my body. Enough of that.
To-night is ripe for pleasure, and indeed,
I would be merry, as beseems a host
Who finds a gracious and unlooked-for guest
Waiting to greet him. [*Takes up a lute.*]
But what is this, my lord?

Why, you have brought a lute to play to us.
Oh! play, sweet Prince. And, if I am bold,
Pardon, but play.

GUIDO

I will not play to-night.
Some other night, Simone.
[*To* BIANCA] You and I
Together, with no listeners but the stars,
Or the more jealous moon.

SIMONE

Nay, but my lord!
Nay, but I do beseech you. For I have heard
That by the simple fingering of a string,
Or delicate breath breathed along hollowed reeds,
Or blown into cold mouths of cunning bronze,
Those who are curious in this art can draw
Poor souls from prison-houses. I have heard also
How such strange magic lurks within these shells
And innocence puts vine-leaves in her hair,
And wantons like a mænad. Let that pass.

Your lute I know is chaste. And therefore
play:
Ravish my ears with some sweet melody;
My soul is in a prison-house, and needs
Music to cure its madness. Good Bianca,
Entreat our guest to play.

BIANCA

Be not afraid,
Our well-loved guest will choose his place and
moment:
That moment is not now. You weary him
With your uncouth insistence.

GUIDO

Honest Simone,
Some other night. To-night I am content
With the low music of Bianca's voice,
Who, when she speaks, charms the too
amorous air,
And makes the reeling earth stand still, or
fix
His cycle round her beauty.

SIMONE

You flatter her.
She has her virtues as most women have,
But beauty is a gem she may not wear.

It is better so, perchance.

Well, my dear lord,
If you will not draw melodies from your lute
To charm my moody and o'er-troubled soul
You 'll drink with me at least? [*Sees table.*]

Your place is laid.
Fetch me a stool, Bianca. Close the shutters.
Set the great bar across. I would not have
The curious world with its small prying eyes
To peer upon our pleasure.

Now, my lord,
Give us a toast from a full brimming cup.

[*Starts back.*]

What is this stain upon the cloth? It looks
As purple as a wound upon Christ's side.
Wine merely is it? I have heard it said
When wine is spilt blood is spilt also,
But that 's a foolish tale.

My lord, I trust
My grape is to your liking? The wine of Naples
Is fiery like its mountains. Our Tuscan vineyards
Yield a more wholesome juice.

GUIDO

I like it well,
Honest Simone; and, with your good leave,
Will toast the fair Bianca when her lips
Have like red rose-leaves floated on this cup
And left its vintage sweeter. Taste, Bianca.
[BIANCA *drinks.*]
Oh, all the honey of Hyblean bees,
Matched with this draught were bit er!
Good Simone,
You do not share the feast.

SIMONE

It is strange, my lord,
I cannot eat or drink with you, to-night.
Some humour, or some fever in my blood,
At other seasons temperate, or some thought
That like an adder creeps from point to point,
That like a madman crawls from cell to cell,
Poisons my palate and makes appetite
A loathing, not a longing. [*Goes aside.*]

GUIDO

Sweet Bianca,
This common chapman wearies me with words.

I must go hence. To-morrow I will come.
Tell me the hour.

BIANCA

Come with the youngest dawn!
Until I see you all my life is vain.

GUIDO

Ah! loose the falling midnight of your hair,
And in those stars, your eyes, let me behold
Mine image, as in mirrors. Dear Bianca,
Though it be but a shadow, keep me there,
Nor gaze at anything that does not show
Some symbol of my semblance. I am jealous
Of what your vision feasts on.

BIANCA

Oh! be sure
Your image will be with me always. Dear,
Love can translate the very meanest thing
Into a sign of sweet remembrances.
But come before the lark with its shrill song
Has waked a world of dreamers. I will stand
Upon the balcony,

GUIDO

And by a ladder
Wrought out of scarlet silk and sewn with pearls

Will come to meet me. White foot after foot,
Like snow upon a rose-tree.

BIANCA

As you will.
You know that I am yours for love or
Death.

GUIDO

Simone, I must go to mine house.

SIMONE

So soon? Why should you? the great
Duomo's bell
Has not yet tolled its midnight, and the
watchman
Who with their hollow horns mock the pale
moon,
Lie drowsy in their towers. Stay awhile.
I fear we may not see you here again,
And that fear saddens my too simple heart.

GUIDO

Be not afraid, Simone. I will stand
Most constant in my friendship. But to-night
I go to mine own home, and that at once.
To-morrow, sweet Bianca.

SIMONE

Well, well, so be it.
I would have wished for fuller converse with you,
My new friend, my honourable guest,
But that it seems may not be.

And besides
I do not doubt your father waits for you.
Wearying for voice or footstep. You, I think,
Are his one child? He has no other child.
You are the gracious pillar of his house,
The flower of a garden full of weeds.
Your father's nephews do not love him well.
So run folk's tongues in Florence. I meant but that;
Men say they envy your inheritance
And look upon your vineyard with fierce eyes
As Ahab looked on Naboth's goodly field.
But that is but the chatter of a town
Where women talk too much.

Good night, my lord.
Fetch a pine torch, Bianca. The old staircase
Is full of pitfalls, and the churlish moon
Grows, like a miser, niggard of her beams,

And hides her face behind a muslin mask
As harlots do when they go forth to snare
Some wretched soul in sin. Now, I will get
Your cloak and sword. Nay, pardon, my good Lord,
It is but meet that I should wait on you
Who have so honoured my poor burgher's house,
Drunk of my wine, and broken bread, and made
Yourself a sweet familiar. Oftentimes
My wife and I will talk of this fair night
And its great issues.
Why, what a sword is this!
Ferrara's temper, pliant as a snake,
And deadlier, I doubt not. With such steel
One need fear nothing in the turmoil of life.
I never touched so delicate a blade.
I have a sword too, somewhat rusted now.
We men of peace are taught humility,
And to bear many burdens on our backs,
And not to murmur at an unjust world,
And to endure unjust indignities.
We are taught that, and like the patient Jew
Find profit in our pain.
Yet I remember

How once upon the road to Padua
A robber sought to take my pack-horse from me,
I slit his throat and left him. I can bear
Dishonour, public insult, many shames,
Shrill scorn, and open contumely, but he
Who filches from me something that is mine,
Ay! though it be the meanest trencher-plate
From which I feed mine appetite—oh! he
Perils his soul and body in the theft
And dies for his small sin. From what strange clay
We men are moulded!

GUIDO

Why do you speak like this?

SIMONE

I wonder, my Lord Guido, if my sword
Is better tempered than this steel of yours?
Shall we make trial? Or is my state too low
For you to cross your rapier against mine,
In jest, or earnest?

GUIDO

Naught would please me better
Than to stand fronting you with naked blade

In jest, or earnest. Give me mine own sword.
Fetch yours. To-night will settle the great issue
Whether the Prince's or the merchant's steel
Is better tempered. Was not that your word?
Fetch your own sword. Why do you tarry, sir?

SIMONE

My lord, of all the gracious courtesies
That you have showered on my barren house
This is the highest.
Bianca, fetch my sword.
Thrust back that stool and table. We must have
An open circle for our match at arms,
And good Bianca here shall hold the torch
Lest what is but a jest grow serious.

BIANCA [*to* GUIDO]

Oh! kill him, kill him!

SIMONE

Hold the torch, Bianca
[*They begin to fight.*]

SIMONE

Have at you! Ah! Ha! would you?

[*He is wounded by* GUIDO.]

A scratch, no more. The torch was in mine eyes.
Do not look sad, Bianca. It is nothing.
Your husband bleeds, 'tis nothing. Take a cloth,
Bind it about mine arm. Nay, not so tight.
More softly, my good wife. And be not sad,
I pray you be not sad. No: take it off.
What matter if I bleed? [*Tears bandage off.*]
Again! again!

[SIMONE *disarms* GUIDO]

My gentle Lord, you see that I was right.
My sword is better tempered, finer steel,
But let us match our daggers.

BIANCA [*to* GUIDO]

Kill him! kill him!

SIMONE

Put out the torch, Bianca.

[BIANCA *puts out torch.*]

Now, my good Lord,
Now to the death of one, or both of us,
Or all the three it may be. [*They fight.*]

There and there.
Ah, devil! do I hold thee in my grip?
[SIMONE *overpowers* GUIDO *and throws him down over table.*]

GUIDO

Fool! take your strangling fingers from my throat.
I am my father's only son; the State
Has but one heir, and that false enemy France
Waits for the ending of my father's line
To fall upon our city.

SIMONE

Hush! your father
When he is childless will be happier.
As for the State, I think our state of Florence
Needs no adulterous pilot at its helm.
Your life would soil its lilies.

GUIDO

Take off your hands.
Take off your damned hands. Loose me, I say!

SIMONE

Nay, you are caught in such a cunning vice
That nothing will avail you, and your life

Narrowed into a single point of shame
Ends with that shame and ends most shamefully.

GUIDO

Oh! let me have a priest before I die!

SIMONE

What wouldst thou have a priest for? Tell thy sins
To God, whom thou shalt see this very night
And then no more for ever. Tell thy sins
To Him who is most just, being pitiless,
Most pitiful being just. As for myself. . . .

GUIDO

Oh! help me, sweet Bianca! help me, Bianca,
Thou knowest I am innocent of harm.

SIMONE

What, is there life yet in those lying lips?
Die like a dog with lolling tongue! Die! Die!
And the dumb river shall receive your corse
And wash it all unheeded to the sea.

GUIDO

Lord Christ receive my wretched soul to-night!

SIMONE

Amen to that. Now for the other.

[*He dies.* SIMONE *rises and looks at* BIANCA. *She comes towards him as one dazea with wonder and with outstretched arms.*]

BIANCA

Why
Did you not tell me you were so strong?

SIMONE

Why
Did you not tell me you were beautiful?

[*He kisses her on the mouth.*]

CURTAIN

VERA

OR

THE NIHILISTS

A DRAMA IN A

PROLOGUE, AND FOUR ACTS

This play was written in 1881, and is now (1907) published for the first time with the author's own corrections and additions to the original text, which was privately printed in New York, 1882. Pirated editions have been printed from the prompt copies.

PERSONS IN THE PROLOGUE

PETER SABOUROFF (an Innkeeper)
VERA SABOUROFF (his Daughter)
MICHAEL (a Peasant)
DMITRI SABOUROFF
NICOLAS
COLONEL KOTEMKIN

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

IVAN THE CZAR
PRINCE PAUL MARALOFFSKI (Prime Minister of Russia)
PRINCE PETROVITCH
COUNT ROUVALOFF
MARQUIS DE POIVRARD
BARON RAFF
GENERAL KOTEMKIN
A Page
Colonel of the Guard

NIHILISTS

PETER TCHERNAVITCH, President of the Nihilists.
MICHAEL
ALEXIS IVANACIEVITCH, known as a Student of Medicine
PROFESSOR MARFA
VERA SABOUROFF

Soldiers, Conspirators, etc.

PROLOGUE

SCENE

A Russian Inn

Large door opening on snowy landscape at back of stage.

[PETER SABOUROFF *and* MICHAEL]

PETER

[*Warming his hands at a stove.*] Has Vera not come back yet, Michael?

MICHAEL

No, Father Peter, not yet; 'tis a good three miles to the post office, and she has to milk the cows besides, and that dun one is a rare plaguey creature for a wench to handle.

PETER

Why didn't you go with her, you young fool? she'll never love you unless you are always at her heels; women like to be bothered.

MICHAEL

She says I bother her too much already,

PROLOGUE Father Peter, and I fear she 'll never love me after all.

PETER

Tut, tut, boy, why shouldn't she? you 're young, and wouldn't be ill-favoured either, had God or thy mother given thee another face. Aren't you one of Prince Maraloffski's gamekeepers; and haven't you got a good grass farm, and the best cow in the village? What more does a girl want?

MICHAEL

But Vera, Father Peter—

PETER

Vera, my lad, has got too many ideas; I don't think much of ideas myself; I 've got on well enough in life without 'em; why shouldn't my children? There 's Dmitri! could have stayed here and kept the inn; many a young lad would have jumped at the offer in these hard times; but he, scatter-brained featherhead of a boy, must needs go off to Moscow to study the law! What does he want knowing about the law! let a man do his duty, say I, and no one will trouble him.

MICHAEL.

Ay! but, Father Peter, they say a good lawyer can break the law as often as he likes, and no one can say him nay. If a man knows the law he knows his duty.

PETER

True, Michael, if a man knows the law there is nothing illegal he cannot do when he likes: that is why folk become lawyers. That is about all they are good for: and there he stays, and has not written a line to us for four months now—a good son that, eh?

MICHAEL

Come, come, Father Peter, Dmitri's letters must have gone astray—perhaps the new postman can't read; he looks stupid enough, and Dmitri, why, he was the best fellow in the village. Do you remember how he shot the bear at the barn in the great winter?

PETER

Ay, it was a good shot; I never did a better myself.

MICHAEL

And as for dancing, he tired out three fiddlers Christmas come two years.

PROLOGUE PETER

Ay, ay, he was a merry lad. It is the girl that has the seriousness—she goes about as solemn as a priest for days at a time.

MICHAEL

Vera is always thinking of others.

PETER

There is her mistake, boy. Let God and our little Father the Czar look to the world. It is none of my work to mend my neighbour's thatch. Why, last winter old Michael was frozen to death in his sleigh in the snowstorm, and his wife and children starved afterwards when the hard times came; but what business was it of mine? I didn't make the world. Let God and the Czar look to it. And then the blight came, and the black plague with it, and the priests couldn't bury the people fast enough, and they lay dead on the roads—men and women both. But what business was it of mine? I didn't make the world. Let God and the Czar look to it. Or two autumns ago, when the river overflowed on a sudden, and the children's school was carried away and drowned every girl and boy in it.

I didn't make the world—let God or the Czar look to it.

MICHAEL

But, Father Peter—

PETER

No, no, boy; no man could live if he took his neighbour's pack on his shoulders. [*Enter* VERA *in peasant's dress.*] Well, my girl, you've been long enough away—where is the letter?

VERA

There is none to-day, Father.

PETER

I knew it.

VERA

But there will be one to-morrow, Father.

PETER

Curse him, for an ungrateful son.

VERA

O Father, don't say that; he must be sick.

PETER

Ay! Sick of profligacy, perhaps.

How dare you say that of him, Father? You know that is not true.

PETER

Where does the money go, then? Michael, listen. I gave Dmitri half his mother's fortune to bring with him to pay the lawyer folk at Moscow. He has only written three times, and every time for more money. He got it, not at my wish, but at hers [*pointing to* VERA], and now for five months, close on six almost, we have heard nothing from him.

VERA

Father, he will come back.

PETER

Ay! the prodigals always return; but let him never darken my doors again.

VERA

[*Sitting down pensive.*] Some evil has come on him; he must be dead! Oh! Michael, I am so wretched about Dmitri.

MICHAEL

Will you never love any one but him, Vera?

VERA

[*Smiling.*] I don't know; there is so much else to do in the world but love.

MICHAEL

Nothing else worth doing, Vera.

PETER

What noise is that, Vera? [*A metallic clink is heard.*]

VERA

[*Rising and going to the door.*] I don't know, Father; it is not like the cattle bells, or I would think Nicholas had come from the fair. Oh Father! it is soldiers coming down the hill—there is one of them on horseback. How pretty they look! But there are some men with them, with chains on! They must be robbers. Oh! don't let them in, Father; I couldn't look at them.

PETER

Men in chains! Why, we are in luck, my child! I heard this was to be the new road to Siberia, to bring the prisoners to the mines; but I didn't believe it. My fortune is made! Bustle, Vera, bustle! I'll die a rich man

PROLOGUE after all. There will be no lack of good customers now. An honest man should have the chance of making his living out of rascals now and then.

VERA

Are these men rascals, Father? What have they done?

PETER

I reckon they're some of those Nihilists the priest warns us against. Don't stand there idle, my girl.

VERA

I suppose, then, they are all wicked men.

[*Sound of soldiers outside; cry of 'Halt!' enter Russian officer with a body of soldiers and eight men in chains, raggedly dressed; one of them on entering, hurriedly puts his coat above his ears and hides his face; some soldiers guard the door, others sit down; the prisoners stand.*]

COLONEL

Innkeeper!

PETER

Yes, Colonel.

COLONEL

[*Pointing to Nihilists.*] Give these men some bread and water.

PETER

[*To himself.*] I shan't make much out of that order.

COLONEL

As for myself, what have you got fit to eat?

PETER

Some good dried venison, your Excellency—and some rye whisky.

COLONEL

Nothing else?

PETER

Why, more whisky, your Excellency.

COLONEL

What clods these peasants are! You have a better room than this?

PETER

Yes, sir.

COLONEL

Bring me there. Sergeant, post your picket

 outside, and see that these scoundrels do not communicate with any one. No letter writing, you dogs, or you 'll be flogged for it. Now for the venison. [*To* PETER *bowing before him.*] Get out of the way, you fool! Who is that girl? [*sees* VERA].

PETER
My daughter, your Highness.

COLONEL
Can she read and write?

PETER
Ay, that she can, sir.

COLONEL
Then she is a dangerous woman. No peasant should be allowed to do anything of the kind. Till your fields, store your harvests, pay your taxes, and obey your masters—that is your duty.

VERA
Who are our masters?

COLONEL
Young woman, these men are going to the mines for life for asking the same foolish question.

VERA

Then they have been unjustly condemned.

PETER

Vera, keep your tongue quiet. She is a foolish girl, sir, who talks too much.

COLONEL

Every woman does talk too much. Come, where is this venison? Count, I am waiting for you. How can you see anything in a girl with coarse hands? [*He passes with* PETER *and his aide-de-camp into an inner room.*]

VERA

[*To one of the Nihilists.*] Won't you sit down? you must be tired.

SERGEANT

Come now, young woman, no talking to my prisoners.

VERA

I shall speak to them. How much do you want?

SERGEANT

How much have you?

PROLOGUE VERA

Will you let these men sit down if I give you this? [*Takes off her peasant's necklace.*] It is all I have; it was my mother's.

SERGEANT

Well, it looks pretty enough, and is heavy too. What do you want with these men?

VERA

They are hungry and wretched. Let me go to them?

ONE OF THE SOLDIERS

Let the wench be, if she pays us.

SERGEANT

Well, have your way. If the Colonel sees you, you may have to come with us, my pretty one.

VERA

[*Advances to the Nihilists.*] Sit down; you must be tired. [*Serves them food.*] What are you?

A PRISONER

Nihilists.

VERA

Who put you in chains?

PRISONER

Our Father the Czar.

VERA

Why?

PRISONER

For loving liberty too well.

VERA

[*To the prisoner who hides his face.*] What did you want to do?

DMITRI

To give liberty to thirty millions of people enslaved to one man.

VERA

[*Startled at the voice.*] What is your name?

DMITRI

I have no name.

VERA

Where are your friends?

DMITRI

I have no friends.

VERA

Let me see your face!

DMITRI

You will see nothing but suffering in it. They have tortured me.

VERA

[*Tears his cloak from his face.*] O God! Dmitri! my brother!

DMITRI

Hush! Vera; be calm. You must not let my father know; it would kill him. I thought I could free Russia. I heard men talk of Liberty one night in a café. I had never heard the word before. It seemed to be a new God they spoke of. I joined them. It was there all the money went. Five months ago they seized us. They found me printing the paper. I am going to the mines for life. I could not write. I thought it would be better to let you think I was dead; for they are bringing us to a living tomb.

VERA

[*Looking round.*] You must escape, Dmitri. I will take your place.

DMITRI

Impossible! You can only revenge us.

VERA

I shall revenge you.

DMITRI

Listen! there is a house in Moscow—

SERGEANT

Prisoners, attention!—the Colonel is coming—young woman, your time is up.

[*Enter* COLONEL, AIDE-DE-CAMP, *and* PETER.]

PETER

I hope your Highness is pleased with the venison. I shot it myself.

COLONEL

It had been better had you talked less about it. Sergeant, get ready. [*Gives purse to* PETER.] Here, you cheating rascal!

PETER

My fortune is made! long live your Highness. I hope your Highness will come often this way.

COLONEL

By St. Nicholas, I hope not. It is too cold here for me. [*To* VERA.] Young girl,

 don't ask questions again about what does not concern you. I will not forget your face.

VERA

Nor I yours, or what you are doing.

COLONEL

You peasants are getting too saucy since you ceased to be serfs, and the knout is the best school for you to learn politics in. Sergeant, proceed.

[*The* COLONEL *turns and goes to top of stage. The prisoners pass out double file; as* DMITRI *passes* VERA *he lets a piece of paper fall on the ground; she puts her foot on it and remains immobile.*]

PETER

[*Who has been counting the money the* COLONEL *gave him.*] Long life to your Highness. I will hope to see another batch soon. [*Suddenly catches sight of* DMITRI *as he is going out of the door, and screams and rushes up.*] Dmitri! Dmitri! my God! what brings you here? he is innocent, I tell you. I'll pay for him. Take your money [*flings money on the ground*],

take all I have, give me my son. Villains! Villains! where are you bringing him?

COLONEL

To Siberia, old man.

PETER

No, no; take me instead.

COLONEL

He is a Nihilist.

PETER

You lie! you lie! He is innocent. [*The soldiers force him back with their guns and shut the door against him. He beats with his fists against it.*] Dmitri! Dmitri! a Nihilist! a Nihilist! [*Falls down on floor.*]

VERA

[*Who has remained motionless, picks up paper now from under her foot and reads.*] '99 Rue Tchernavaya, Moscow. To strangle whatever nature is in me; neither to love nor to be loved; neither to pity nor to be pitied; neither to marry nor to be given in marriage, till the end is come.' My brother, I shall

PROLOGUE keep the oath. [*Kisses the paper.*] You shall be revenged!

[VERA *stands immobile, holding paper in her lifted hand.* PETER *is lying on the floor.* MICHAEL, *who has just come in, is bending over him.*]

END OF PROLOGUE

ACT I

SCENE

99 Tchernavaya, Moscow. A large garret lit by oil lamps hung from ceiling. Some masked men standing silent and apart from one another. A man in a scarlet mask is writing at a table. Door at back. Man in yellow with drawn sword at it. Knocks heard. Figures in cloaks and masks enter.

Password. Per crucem ad lucem.

Answer. Per sanguinem ad libertatem.

[*Clock strikes.* CONSPIRATORS *form a semicircle in the middle of the stage.*]

PRESIDENT

What is the word?

FIRST CONSPIRATOR

Nabat.

PRESIDENT

The answer?

SECOND CONSPIRATOR

Kalit.

VERA;

ACT I. PRESIDENT

What hour is it?

THIRD CONSPIRATOR

The hour to suffer

PRESIDENT

What day?

FOURTH CONSPIRATOR

The day of oppression.

PRESIDENT

What year?

FIFTH CONSPIRATOR

The year of hope.

PRESIDENT

How many are we in number?

SIXTH CONSPIRATOR

Ten, nine, and three.

PRESIDENT

The Galilæan had less to conquer the world; but what is our mission?

SEVENTH CONSPIRATOR

To give freedom.

PRESIDENT

Our creed?

EIGHTH CONSPIRATOR

To annihilate.

PRESIDENT

Our duty?

NINTH CONSPIRATOR

To obey.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, the questions have been answered well. There are none but Nihilists present. Let us see each other's faces. [*The* CONSPIRATORS *unmask.*] Michael, recite the oath.

MICHAEL

To strangle whatever nature is in us; neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor to be pitied, neither to marry nor to be given in marriage, till the end is come; to stab secretly by night; to drop poison in the glass; to set father against son, and husband against wife; without fear, without hope, without future, to suffer, to annihilate, to revenge.

ACT I. PRESIDENT

Are we all agreed?

CONSPIRATORS

We are all agreed. [*They disperse in various directions about the stage.*]

PRESIDENT

'Tis after the hour, Michael, and she is not yet here.

MICHAEL

Would that she were! We can do little without her.

ALEXIS

She cannot have been seized, President? but the police are on her track, I know.

MICHAEL

You always do seem to know a good deal about the movements of the police in Moscow —too much for an honest conspirator.

PRESIDENT

If those dogs have caught her, the red flag of the people will float on a barricade in every street till we find her! It was foolish of her to go to the Grand Duke's ball. I told her so, but she said she wanted to see

the Czar and all his cursed brood face to face for once. ACT I.

ALEXIS

Gone to the State ball!

MICHAEL

I have no fear. She is as hard to capture as a she-wolf is, and twice as dangerous; besides, she is well disguised. To-night it is a masked ball. But is there any news from the Palace, President? What is that bloody despot doing now besides torturing his only son? What sort of a whelp is this Czarevitch, by the way? Have any of you seen him? One hears strange stories about him. They say he loves the people; but a king's son never does that. You cannot breed them like that.

PRESIDENT

Since he came back from abroad a year ago his father has kept him in close prison in his palace.

MICHAEL

An excellent training to make him a tyrant in his turn; but is there any news, I say?

PRESIDENT

A council is to be held to-morrow, at four o'clock, on some secret business the committee cannot find out.

MICHAEL

A council in a king's palace is sure to be about some bloody work or other. But in what room is it to be held?

PRESIDENT

[*Reading from letter.*] In the yellow tapestry room called after the Empress Catherine.

MICHAEL

I care not for such long-sounding names. I would know where it is.

PRESIDENT

I cannot tell, Michael. I know more about the inside of prisons than of palaces.

MICHAEL

[*Speaking suddenly to* ALEXIS.] Where is this room, Alexis?

ALEXIS

It is on the first floor, looking out on to the inner courtyard. But why do you ask, Michael?

MICHAEL

Nothing, nothing, boy! I merely take a great interest in the Czar's life and movements, and I knew you could tell me all about the palace. Every poor student of medicine in Moscow knows all about kings' houses. It is their duty, is it not?

ALEXIS

[*Aside.*] Can Michael suspect me? There is something strange in his manner to-night. Why doesn't she come? The whole fire of revolution seems fallen into dull ashes when she is not here.

MICHAEL

Have you cured many patients, lately, at your hospital, boy?

ALEXIS

There is one who lies sick to death I would fain cure, but cannot.

MICHAEL

Ay! and who is that?

ALEXIS

Russia, our mother.

MICHAEL

The curing of Russia is surgeon's business, and must be done by the knife. I like not your method of medicine.

PRESIDENT

Professor, we have read the proofs of your last article; it is very good indeed.

MICHAEL

What is it about, Professor?

PROFESSOR

The subject, my good brother, is assassination considered as a method of political reform.

MICHAEL

I think little of pen and ink in revolutions. One dagger will do more than a hundred epigrams. Still, let us read this scholar's last production. Give it to me. I will read it myself.

PROFESSOR

Brother, you never mind your stops; let Alexis read it.

MICHAEL

Ay! he is as tripping of speech as if he

were some young aristocrat; but for my own part I care not for the stops so that the sense be plain.

ALEXIS

[*Reading.*] 'The past has belonged to the tyrant, and he has defiled it; ours is the future, and we shall make it holy.' Ay! let us make the future holy; let there be one revolution at least which is not bred in crime, nurtured in murder!

MICHAEL

They have spoken to us by the sword, and by the sword we shall answer! You are too delicate for us, Alexis. There should be none here but men whose hands are rough with labour or red with blood.

PRESIDENT

Peace, Michael, peace! He is the bravest heart amongst us.

MICHAEL

[*Aside*]. He will need to be brave to-night.

[*The sound of sleigh bells is heard outside.*]

 VOICE

[*Outside.*] Per crucem ad lucem.

Answer of man on guard.

Per sanguinem ad libertatem.

MICHAEL

Who is that?

[*Enter* VERA *in a cloak, which she throws off, appearing in full ball dress.*]

VERA

God save the people!

PRESIDENT

Welcome, Vera, welcome! We have been sick at heart till we saw you; but now methinks the star of freedom has come to wake us from the night.

VERA

It is night, indeed, brother! Night without moon or star! Russia is smitten to the heart! The man Ivan whom men called the Czar strikes now at our mother with a dagger deadlier than any ever forged by tyranny against a people's life!

MICHAEL

What has the tyrant done now?

VERA

To-morrow martial law is to be proclaimed over all Russia.

OMNES

Martial law! We are lost! We are lost!

ALEXIS

Martial law! Impossible!

MICHAEL

Fool, nothing is impossible in Russia but reform.

VERA

Ay, martial law. The last right to which the people clung has been taken from them. Without trial, without appeal, without accuser even, our brothers will be taken from their houses, shot in the streets like dogs, sent away to die in the snow, to starve in the dungeon, to rot in the mine. Do you know what martial law means? It means the strangling of a whole nation. The streets will be filled with soldiers night and day; there will be sentinels at every door. No man dare walk abroad now but the spy or the traitor. Cooped up in the dens we hide in,

 meeting by stealth, speaking with bated breath; what good can we do now for Russia?

PRESIDENT

We can suffer at least.

VERA

We have done that too much already. The hour is now come to annihilate and to revenge.

PRESIDENT

Up to this the people have borne everything.

VERA

Because they have understood nothing. But now we, the Nihilists, have given them the tree of knowledge to eat of, and the day of silent suffering is over for Russia.

MICHAEL

Martial law, Vera! This is fearful tidings you bring.

PRESIDENT

It is the death-warrant of liberty in Russia

VERA

Or the signal for revolution.

MICHAEL ACT I.

Are you sure it is true?

VERA

Here is the proclamation. I stole it myself at the ball to-night from a young fool, one of Prince Paul's secretaries, who had been given it to copy. It was that which made me so late.

[VERA *hands proclamation to* MICHAEL, *who reads it.*]

MICHAEL

'To ensure the public safety—martial law. By order of the Czar, father of his people.' The father of his people!

VERA

Ay! a father whose name shall not be hallowed, whose kingdom shall change to a republic, whose trespasses shall not be forgiven him, because he has robbed us of our daily bread; with whom is neither might, nor right, nor glory, now or for ever.

PRESIDENT

It must be about this time that the council meet to-morrow. It has not yet been signed.

ALEXIS

It shall not be while I have a tongue to plead with.

MICHAEL

Or while I have hands to smite with.

VERA

Martial law! O God, how easy it is for a king to kill his people by thousands, but we cannot rid ourselves of one crowned man in Europe! What is there of awful majesty in these men which makes the hand unsteady, the dagger treacherous, the pistol-shot harmless? Are they not men of like passions with ourselves, vulnerable to the same diseases, of flesh and blood not different from our own? What made Olgiati tremble at the supreme crisis of that Roman life, and Guido's nerve fail him when he should have been of iron and of steel? A plague, I say, on these fools of Naples, Berlin, and Spain! Methinks that if I stood face to face with one of the crowned men my eye would see more clearly, my aim be more sure, my whole body gain a strength and power that was not my own! Oh, to think what stands between us and freedom in

Europe! a few old men, wrinkled, feeble, tottering dotards whom a boy could strangle for a ducat, or a woman stab in a night-time. These are the things that keep us from liberty. But now methinks the brood of men is dead and the dull earth grown sick of childbearing, else would no crowned dog pollute God's air by living. ACT I.

[illegible]

Try us! Try us! Try us!

MICHAEL

We shall try thee, too, some day, Vera.

VERA

I pray God thou mayest! Have I not strangled whatever nature is in me, and shall I not keep my oath?

MICHAEL

[*To* PRESIDENT.] Martial law, President! Come, there is no time to be lost. We have twelve hours yet before us till the council meet. Twelve hours! One can overthrow a dynasty in less time than that.

PRESIDENT

Ay! or lose one's own head.

[MICHAEL *and the* PRESIDENT *retire to one corner of the stage and sit whispering.* VERA *takes up the proclamation, and reads it to herself.* ALEXIS *watches and suddenly rushes up to her.*]

ALEXIS

Vera!

VERA

Alexis, you here! Foolish boy, have I not prayed you to stay away? All of us here are doomed to die before our time, fated to expiate by suffering whatever good we do; but you, with your bright boyish face, you are too young to die yet.

ALEXIS

One is never too young to die for one's country!

VERA

Why do you come here night after night?

ALEXIS

Because I love the people.

VERA

But your fellow-students must miss you. Are there no traitors among them? You know what spies there are in the University here. O Alexis, you must go! You see how desperate suffering has made us. There is no room here for a nature like yours. You must not come again.

ALEXIS

Why do you think so poorly of me? Why should I live while my brothers suffer?

VERA

You spake to me of your mother once. You said you loved her. Oh, think of her!

ALEXIS

I have no mother now but Russia, my life is hers to take or give away; but to-night I am here to see you. They tell me you are leaving for Novgorod to-morrow.

VERA

I must. They are getting faint-hearted there, and I would fan the flame of this revolution into such a blaze that the eyes of all kings in Europe shall be blinded. If martial law is passed they will need me all

 the more there. There is no limit, it seems, to the tyranny of one man; but to the suffering of a whole people there shall be a limit. Too many of us have died on block and barricade: it is their turn to be victims now.

ALEXIS

God knows it, I am with you. But you must not go. The police are watching every train for you. When you are seized they have orders to place you without trial in the lowest dungeon of the palace. I know it—no matter how. Oh, think how without you the sun goes from our life, how the people will lose their leader and liberty her priestess. Vera, you must not go!

VERA

You are right: I will stay. I would live a little longer for freedom, a little longer for Russia.

ALEXIS

When you die then Russia is smitten indeed; when you die then I shall lose all hope—all. . . . Vera, this is fearful news you bring—martial law—it is too terrible. I knew it not, by my soul, I knew it not!

VERA

How could you have known it? It is too well laid a plot for that. This great White Czar, whose hands are red with the blood of the people he has murdered, whose soul is black with his iniquity, is the cleverest conspirator of us all. Oh, how could Russia bear two hearts like yours and his!

ALEXIS

Vera, the Emperor was not always like this. There was a time when he loved the people. It is that devil, whom God curse, Prince Paul Maraloffski who has brought him to this. To-morrow, I swear it, I shall plead for the people to the Emperor.

VERA

Plead to the Czar! Foolish boy, it is only those who are sentenced to death that ever see our Czar. Besides, what should he care for a voice that pleads for mercy? The cry of a strong nation in its agony has not moved that heart of stone.

ALEXIS

[*Aside.*] Yet shall I plead to him. They can but kill me.

PROFESSOR

Here are the proclamations, Vera. Do you think they will do?

VERA

I shall read them. How fair he looks! Methinks he never seemed so noble as to-night. Liberty is blessed in having such a lover.

ALEXIS

Well, President, what are you deep in?

MICHAEL

We are thinking of the best way of killing bears. [*Whispers to* PRESIDENT *and leads him aside.*]

PROFESSOR

[*To* VERA]. And the letters from our brothers at Paris and Berlin. What answer shall we send to them?

VERA

[*Takes them mechanically.*] Had I not strangled nature, sworn neither to love nor to be loved, methinks I might have loved him. Oh, I am a fool, a traitor myself, a traitor myself! But why did he come

amongst us with his bright young face, his heart aflame for liberty, his pure white soul? Why does he make me feel at times as if I would have him as my king, Republican though I be? Oh, fool, fool, fool! False to your oath! weak as water! Have done! Remember what you are — a Nihilist, a Nihilist!

PRESIDENT

[*To* MICHAEL.] But you will be seized, Michael.

MICHAEL

I think not. I will wear the uniform of the Imperial Guard, and the Colonel on duty is one of us. It is on the first floor, you remember; so I can take a long shot.

PRESIDENT

Shall I not tell the brethren?

MICHAEL

Not a word, not a word! There is a traitor amongst us.

VERA

Come, are these the proclamations? Yes, they will do; yes, they will do. Send five

ACT I. hundred to Kiev and Odessa and Novgorod, five hundred to Warsaw, and have twice the number distributed among the Southern provinces, though these dull Russian peasants care little for our proclamations, and less for our martyrdoms. When the blow is struck, it must be from the town, not from the country.

MICHAEL

Ay, and by the sword, not by the goose-quill.

VERA

Where are the letters from Poland?

PROFESSOR

Here.

VERA

Unhappy Poland! The eagles of Russia have fed on her heart. We must not forget our brothers there.

PRESIDENT

Is it true, Michael?

MICHAEL

Ay, I stake my life on it.

PRESIDENT

Let the doors be locked, then. Alexis Ivanacievitch entered on our roll of the brothers as a student of the School of Medicine at Moscow. Why did you not tell us of this bloody scheme of martial law?

ALEXIS

I, President?

MICHAEL

Ay, you! You knew it, none better. Such weapons as these are not forged in a day. Why did you not tell us of it? A week ago there had been time to lay the mine, to raise the barricade, to strike one blow at least for liberty. But now the hour is past! It is too late, it is too late! Why did you keep it a secret from us, I say?

ALEXIS

Now by the hand of freedom, Michael, my brother, you wrong me. I knew nothing of this hideous law. By my soul, my brothers, I knew not of it! How should I know?

MICHAEL

Because you are a traitor! Where did you

 go when you left us the night of our last meeting here?

ALEXIS

To mine own house, Michael.

MICHAEL

Liar! I was on your track. You left here an hour after midnight. Wrapped in a large cloak, you crossed the river by a boat a mile below the second bridge, and gave the ferryman a gold piece, you, the poor student of medicine! You doubled back twice, and hid in an archway so long that I had almost made up my mind to stab you at once, only that I am fond of hunting. So! you thought you had baffled all pursuit, did you? Fool! I am a bloodhound that never loses the scent. I followed you from street to street. At last I saw you pass swiftly across the Place St. Isaac, whisper to the guards some secret password, enter the palace by a private door with your own key.

CONSPIRATORS

The palace!

VERA

Alexis!

MICHAEL

I waited. All through the dreary watches of our long Russian night I waited, that I might kill you with your Judas hire still hot in your hand. But you never came back; you never left that palace. I saw the blood-red sun rise through the yellow fog over the murky town; I saw a new day of oppression dawn on Russia; but you never came back. So you pass nights in the palace, do you? You know the password for the guards; you have a key to a secret door. You are a spy—I never trusted you, with your soft white hands, your curled hair, your pretty graces. You have no mark of suffering about you; you cannot be of the people. You are a spy—a spy—traitor!

OMNES

Kill him! Kill him! [*Draw their knives.*]

VERA

[*Rushing in front of* ALEXIS.] Stand back, I say, Michael! Stand back all! Do not dare lay a hand upon him! He is the noblest heart amongst us.

OMNES

Kill him! Kill him! He is a spy!

VERA

Dare to lay a finger on him, and I leave you all to yourselves.

PRESIDENT

Vera, did you not hear what Michael said of him? He stayed all night in the Czar's palace. He has a password and a private key. What else should he be but a spy?

VERA

Bah! I do not believe Michael. It is a lie! It is a lie! Alexis, say it is a lie!

ALEXIS

It is true. Michael has told what he saw. I did pass that night in the Czar's palace. Michael has spoken the truth.

VERA

Stand back, I say; stand back! Alexis, I do not care. I trust you; you would not betray us; you would not sell the people for money. You are honest, true! Oh, say you are no spy!

ALEXIS

Spy? You know I am not. I am with you, my brothers, to the death.

MICHAEL

Ay, to your own death.

ALEXIS

Vera, you know I am true.

VERA

I know it well.

PRESIDENT

Why are you here, traitor?

ALEXIS

Because I love the people.

MICHAEL

Then you can be a martyr for them?

VERA

You must kill me first, Michael, before you lay a finger on him.

PRESIDENT

Michael, we dare not lose Vera. It is her whim to let this boy live. We can keep him here to-night. Up to this he has not betrayed us.

[*Tramp of soldiers outside, knocking at door.*]

VOICE

Open, in the name of the Emperor!

MICHAEL

He *has* betrayed us. This is your doing, spy!

PRESIDENT

Come, Michael, come. We have no time to cut one another's throats while we have our own heads to save.

VOICE

Open, in the name of the Emperor!

PRESIDENT

Brothers, be masked, all of you. Michael, open the door. It is our only chance.

[*Enter* GENERAL KOTEMKIN *and soldiers.*]

GENERAL

All honest citizens should be in their own houses an hour before midnight, and not more than five people have a right to meet privately. Have you not noticed the proclamation, fellows?

MICHAEL

Ay, you have spoiled every honest wall in Moscow with it.

VERA

Peace, Michael, peace. Nay, Sir, we knew it not. We are a company of strolling players travelling from Samara to Moscow to amuse his Imperial Majesty the Czar.

GENERAL

But I heard loud voices before I entered. What was that?

VERA

We were rehearsing a new tragedy.

GENERAL

Your answers are too *honest* to be true. Come, let me see who you are. Take off those players' masks. By St. Nicholas, my beauty, if your face matches your figure, you must be a choice morsel! Come, I say, pretty one; I would sooner see your face than those of all the others.

PRESIDENT

O God! if he sees it is Vera, we are all lost!

GENERAL

No coquetting, my girl. Come, unmask, I say, or I shall tell my guards to do it for you.

ALEXIS

Stand back, I say, General Kotemkin!

GENERAL

Who are you, fellow, that talk with such a tripping tongue to your betters? [ALEXIS *takes his mask off.*] His Imperial Highness the Czarevitch!

OMNES

The Czarevitch! It is all over!

PRESIDENT

I knew he was a spy. He will give us up to the soldiers.

MICHAEL

[*To* VERA]. Why did you not let me kill him? Come we must fight to the death for it.

VERA

Peace! he will not betray us.

ALEXIS

A whim of mine, General! You know how my father keeps me from the world and imprisons me in the palace. I should really be

bored to death if I could not get out at night in disguise sometimes, and have some romantic adventure in town. I fell in with these honest folks a few hours ago.

GENERAL

Actors, are they, Prince?

ALEXIS

Ay, and very ambitious actors, too. They only care to play before kings.

GENERAL

I' faith, your Highness, I was in hopes I had made a good haul of Nihilists.

ALEXIS

Nihilists in Moscow, General! with you as head of the police? Impossible!

GENERAL

So I always tell your Imperial father. But I heard at the council to-day that that woman Vera Sabouroff, the head of them, had been seen in this very city. The Emperor's face turned as white as the snow outside. I think I never saw such terror in any man before.

ALEXIS

She is a dangerous woman, then, this Vera Sabouroff?

GENERAL

The most dangerous in all Europe.

ALEXIS

Did you ever see her, General?

GENERAL

Why, five years ago, when I was a plain Colonel, I remember her, your Highness, a common waiting-girl in an inn. If I had known then what she was going to turn out, I would have flogged her to death on the road-side. She is not a woman at all; she is a sort of devil! For the last eighteen months I have been hunting her, and caught sight of her once last September outside Odessa.

ALEXIS

How did you let her go, General?

GENERAL

I was by myself, and she shot one of my horses just as I was gaining on her. If I see her again I shan't miss my chance. The

Emperor has put twenty thousand roubles on her head.

ALEXIS

I hope you will get it, General; but meanwhile you are frightening these honest folk out of their wits, and disturbing the tragedy. Good-night, General.

GENERAL

Yes; but I should like to see their faces, your Highness.

ALEXIS

No, General; you must not ask that; you know how these gipsies hate to be stared at.

GENERAL

Yes. But, your Highness—

ALEXIS

[*Haughtily.*] General, they are my friends, that is enough. Good-night. And, General, not a word of my little adventure here, you understand.

GENERAL

But shall we not see you back to the palace? The State ball is almost over and you are expected.

ALEXIS

I shall be there; but I shall return alone. Remember, not a word.

GENERAL

Or your pretty gipsy, eh, Prince? your pretty gipsy! I' faith, I should like to see her before I go; she has such fine eyes through her mask. Well, good night, your Highness; good night.

ALEXIS

Good night, General.

[*Exeunt* GENERAL *and the soldiers.*]

VERA

[*Throwing off her mask.*] Saved! and by you!

ALEXIS

[*Clasping her hand.*] Brothers, you trust me now? [*Exit.*

Tableau

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE

Council Chamber in the Emperor's Palace, hung with yellow tapestry. Table, with chair of State, set for the Czar; window behind, opening on to a balcony. As the scene progresses the light outside gets darker.

Present.—PRINCE PAUL MARALOFFSKI. PRINCE PETROVITCH. COUNT ROUVALOFF. BARON RAFF. COUNT PETOUCHOF.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

So our young scatter-brained Czarevitch has been forgiven at last, and is to take his seat here again.

PRINCE PAUL

Yes; if that is not meant as an extra punishment. For my own part, at least, I find these Cabinet Councils extremely tiring.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Naturally; you are always speaking.

 PRINCE PAUL

No; I think it must be that I have to listen sometimes. It is so exhausting not to talk.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

Still, anything is better than being kept in a sort of prison, like he was—never allowed to go out into the world.

PRINCE PAUL

My dear Count, for romantic young people like he is the world always looks best at a distance; and a prison where one's allowed to order one's own dinner is not at all a bad place. [*Enter the* CZAREVITCH. *The courtiers rise.*] Ah! Good afternoon, Prince. Your Highness is looking a little pale to-day.

CZAREVITCH

[*Slowly, after a pause.*] I want change of air.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Smiling.*] A most revolutionary sentiment! Your Imperial father would highly disapprove of any reforms even with the thermometer in Russia.

CZAREVITCH

[*Bitterly.*] My Imperial father had kept me for six months in this dungeon of a palace. This morning he has me suddenly woke up to see some wretched Nihilists hung; it sickened me, the bloody butchery, though it was a noble thing to see how well these men can die.

PRINCE PAUL

When you are as old as I am, Prince, you will understand that there are few things easier than to live badly and to die well.

CZAREVITCH

Easy to die well! A lesson experience cannot have taught you, much as you know of a bad life.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Experience, the name men give to their mistakes. I never commit any.

CZAREVITCH

[*Bitterly.*] No; crimes are more in your line.

ACT II. PRINCE PETROVITCH

[*To the* CZAREVITCH.] The Emperor was a good deal agitated about your late appearance at the ball last night, Prince.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

[*Laughing.*] I believe he thought the Nihilists had broken into the palace and carried you off.

BARON RAFF

If they had you would have missed a charming dance.

PRINCE PAUL

And an excellent supper. Gringoire really excelled himself in his salad. Ah! you may laugh, Baron; but to cook a good salad is a much more difficult thing than cooking accounts. To make a good salad is to be a brilliant diplomatist — the problem is entirely the same in both cases. To know exactly how much oil one must put with one's vinegar.

BARON RAFF

A cook and a diplomatist! an excellent parallel. If I had a son who was a fool I'd make him one or the other.

PRINCE PAUL

I see your father did not hold the same opinion, Baron. But, believe me, you are wrong to run down cookery. Culture depends on cookery. For myself, the only immortality I desire is to invent a new sauce. I have never had time enough to think seriously about it, but I feel it is in me, I feel it is in me.

CZAREVITCH

You have certainly missed your *métier*, Prince Paul; the *cordon bleu* of the kitchen would have suited you much better than the Grand Cross of Honour. But you know you could never have worn your white apron well; you would have soiled it too soon, your hands are not clean enough.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Bowing.*] You forget—or, how could they be? I manage your father's business.

CZAREVITCH

[*Bitterly.*] You mismanage my father's business, you mean! Evil genius of his life that you are! before you came there was some love left in him. It is you who have

ACT II. embittered his nature, poured into his ear the poison of treacherous counsel, made him hated by the whole people, made him what he is—a tyrant!

[*The courtiers look significantly at each other.*]

PRINCE PAUL

[*Calmly.*] I see your Highness does want change of air. But I have been an eldest son myself. [*Lights a cigarette.*] I know what it is when a father won't die to please one.

[*The* CZAREVITCH *goes to the top of the stage, and leans against the window, looking out.*]

PRINCE PETROVITCH

[*To* BARON RAFF.] Foolish boy! He will be sent into exile, or worse, if he is not careful.

BARON RAFF

Yes. What a mistake it is to be sincere!

PRINCE PETROVITCH

The only folly you have never committed, Baron.

BARON RAFF

One has only one head, you know, Prince.

PRINCE PAUL

My dear Baron, your head is the last thing any one would wish to take from you. [*Pulls out snuff-box and offers it to* PRINCE PETROVITCH].

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Thanks, Prince! Thanks!

PRINCE PAUL

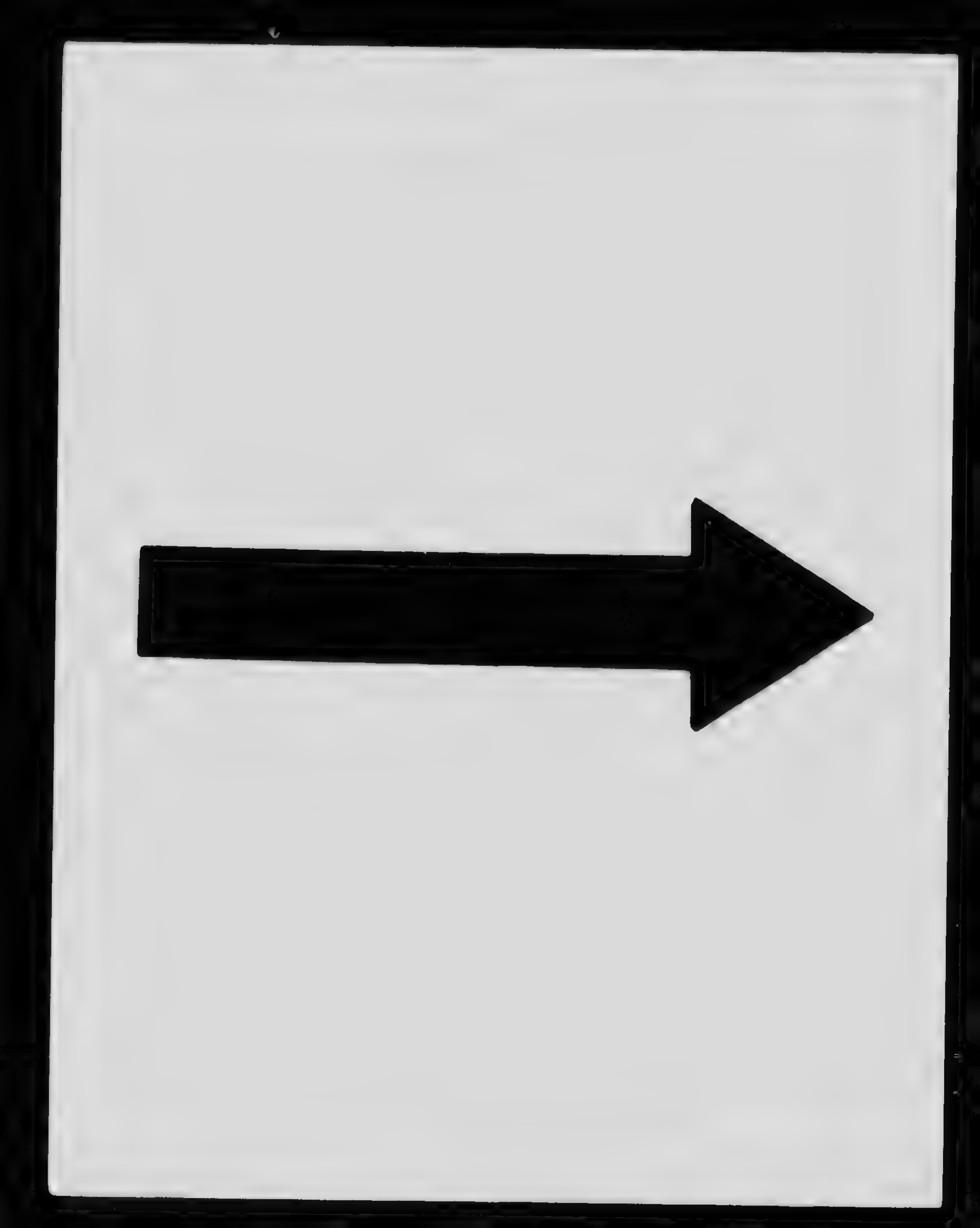
Very delicate, isn't it? I get it direct from Paris. But under this vulgar Republic everything has degenerated over there. Côtelettes à l'impériale vanished of course with the Bonaparte, and omelettes went out with the Orleanists. La belle France is entirely ruined, Prince, through bad morals and worse cookery. [*Enter the* MARQUIS DE POIVRARD.] Ah! Marquis. I trust Madame la Marquise is well.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

You ought to know better than I do, Prince Paul; you see more *of* her.

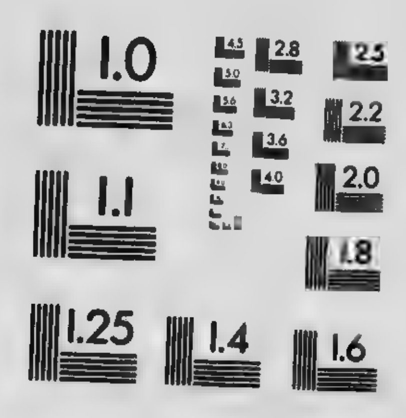
PRINCE PAUL

[*Bowing.*] Perhaps I see more *in* her, Marquis. Your wife is really a charming



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 woman, so full of *esprit*, and so satirical too; she talks continually of you when we are together.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

[*Looking at the clock.*] His Majesty is a little late to-day, is he not?

PRINCE PAUL

What has happened to you, my dear Petrovitch? you seem quite out of sorts. You haven't quarrelled with your cook, I hope? What a tragedy that would be for you; you would lose all your friends.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

I fear I wouldn't be so fortunate as that. You forget I would still have my purse. But you are wrong for once; my chef and I are on excellent terms.

PRINCE PAUL

Then your creditors or Mademoiselle Vera Sabouroff have been writing to you? They compose more than half of my correspondents. But really you needn't be alarmed. I find the most violent proclamations from the

Executive Committee, as they call it, left all over my house. I never read them; they are so badly spelt as a rule.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Wrong again, Prince; the Nihilists leave me alone for some reason or other.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Aside.*] True! Indifference is the revenge the world takes on mediocrities.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

I am bored with life, Prince. Since the opera season ended I have been a perpetual martyr to ennui.

PRINCE PAUL

The maladie du siècle! You want a new excitement, Prince. Let me see—you have been married twice already; suppose you try—falling in love for once.

BARON RAFF

I cannot understand your nature.

 PRINCE PAUL

[*Smiling.*] If my nature had been made to suit your comprehension rather than my own requirements, I am afraid I would have made a very poor figure in the world.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

There seems to be nothing in life about which you would not jest.

PRINCE PAUL

Ah! my dear Count, life is much too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it.

CZAREVITCH

[*Coming back from window.*] I don't think Prince Paul's nature is such a mystery. He would stab his best friend for the sake of writing an epigram on his tombstone.

PRINCE PAUL

Parbleu! I would sooner lose my best friend than my worst enemy. To have friends, you know, one need only be good-natured; but when a man has no enemy left there must be something mean about him.

CZAREVITCH

[*Bitterly.*] If to have enemies is a measure of greatness, then you must be a Colossus, indeed, Prince.

PRINCE PAUL

Yes, your Highness, I know I'm the most hated man in Russia, except your father, except your father of course. He doesn't seem to like it much, by the way; but I do, I assure you. [*Bitterly.*] I love to drive through the streets and see how the rabble scowl at me from every corner. It makes me feel I am a power in Russia; one man against millions! Besides, I have no ambition to be a popular hero, to be crowned with laurels one year and pelted with stones the next; I prefer dying peaceably in my own bed.

CZAREVITCH

And after death?

PRINCE PAUL

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Heaven is a despotism. I shall be at home there.

CZAREVITCH

Do you never think of the people and their rights?

 PRINCE PAUL

The people and their rights bore me. I am sick of both. In these modern days to be vulgar, illiterate, common and vicious, seems to give a man a marvellous infinity of rights that his honest fathers never dreamed of. Believe me, Prince, in good democracy every man should be an aristocrat; but these people in Russia who seek to thrust us out are no better than the animals in one's preserves, and made to be shot at, most of them.

CZAREVITCH

[*Excitedly.*] If they *are* common, illiterate, vulgar, no better than the beasts of the field, who made them so? [*Enter* AIDE-DE-CAMP.]

AIDE-DE-CAMP

His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor! [PRINCE PAUL *looks at the* CZAREVITCH, *and smiles.*]

[*Enter the* CZAR, *surrounded by his guard.*]

CZAREVITCH

[*Rushing forward to meet him.*] Sire!

CZAR

[*Nervous and frightened.*] Don't come too near me, boy! Don't come too near me, I

say! There is always something about an heir to a crown unwholesome to his father. Who is that man over there? I don't know him. What is he doing? Is he a conspirator? Have you searched him? Give him till to-morrow to confess, then hang him!—hang him! ACT II.

PRINCE PAUL

Sire, you are anticipating history. This is Count Petouchof, your new Ambassador to Berlin. He is come to kiss hands on his appointment.

CZAR

To kiss my hand? There is some plot in it. He wants to poison me. There, kiss my son's hand; it will do quite as well.

[PRINCE PAUL *signs to* PRINCE PETOUCHOF *to leave the room. Exeunt* PETOUCHOF *and the guards.* CZAR *sinks down into his chair. The courtiers remain silent.*]

PRINCE PAUL

[*Approaching.*] Sire! will your Majesty——

CZAR

What do you startle me for like that? No,

 I won't. [*Watches the courtiers nervously.*] Why are you clattering your sword, sir? [*To* COUNT ROUVALOFF.] Take it off. I shall have no man wear a sword in my presence [*looking at* CZAREVITCH], least of all my son. [*To* PRINCE PAUL.] You are not angry with me, Prince? You won't desert me, will you? Say you won't desert me. What do you want? You can have anything—anything.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Bowing very low.*] Sire, 'tis enough for me to have your confidence. [*Aside.*] I was afraid he was going to revenge himself, and give me another decoration.

CZAR

[*Returning to his chair.*] Well, gentlemen.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

Sire, I have the honour to present to you a loyal address from your subjects in the Province of Archangel, expressing their horror at the last attempt on your Majesty's life.

PRINCE PAUL

The last attempt but two, you ought to have said, Marquis. Don't you see it is dated three weeks back?

CZAR

They are good people in the Province of Archangel—honest, loyal people. They love me very much—simple, loyal people; give them a new saint, it costs nothing. Well, Alexis [*turning to the* CZAREVITCH]—how many traitors were hung this morning?

CZAREVITCH

There were three men strangled, Sire.

CZAR

There should have been three thousand. I would to God that this people had but one neck that I might strangle them with one noose! Did they tell anything? whom did they implicate? what did they confess?

CZAREVITCH

Nothing, Sire.

CZAR

They should have been tortured then; why weren't they tortured? Must I always be fighting in the dark? Am I never to know from what root these traitors spring?

CZAREVITCH

What root should there be of discontent

 among the people but tyranny and injustice amongst their rulers?

CZAR

What did you say, boy? tyranny! tyranny! Am I a tyrant? I 'm not. I love the people. I 'm their father. I 'm called so in every official proclamation. Have a care, boy; have a care. You don't seem to be cured yet of your foolish tongue. [*Goes over to* PRINCE PAUL *and puts his hand on his shoulder.*] Prince Paul, tell me were there many people there this morning to see the Nihilists hung?

PRINCE PAUL

Hanging is of course a good deal less of a novelty in Russia now, Sire, than it was three or four years ago; and you know how easily the people get tired even of their best amusements. But the square and the tops of the houses were really quite crowded, were they not, Prince? [*To the* CZAREVITCH, *who takes no notice.*]

CZAR

That 's right; all loyal citizens should be

there. It shows them what to look forward to. Did you arrest any one in the crowd? ACT II.

PRINCE PAUL

Yes, Sire; a woman, for cursing your name. [*The* CZAREVITCH *starts anxiously.*] She was the mother of two of the criminals.

CZAR

[*Looking at* CZAREVITCH.] She should have blessed me for having rid her of her children. Send her to prison.

CZAREVITCH

The prisons of Russia are too full already, Sire. There is no room in them for any more victims.

CZAR

They don't die fast enough, then. You should put more of them into one cell at once. You don't keep them long enough in the mines. If you do they're sure to die; but you're all too merciful. I'm too merciful myself. Send her to Siberia. She is sure to die on the way. [*Enter an* AIDE-DE-CAMP.] Who's that? Who's that?

AIDE-DE-CAMP

A letter for his Imperial Majesty.

 CZAR

[*To* PRINCE PAUL.] I won't open it. There may be something in it.

PRINCE PAUL

It would be a very disappointing letter, Sire, if there wasn't. [*Takes letter himself, and reads it.*]

PRINCE PETROVITCH

[*To* COUNT ROUVALOFF.] It must be some sad news. I know that smile too well.

PRINCE PAUL

From the Chief of the Police at Archangel, Sire. 'The Governor of the province was shot this morning by a woman as he was entering the courtyard of his own house. The assassin has been seized.'

CZAR

I never trusted the people in Archangel. It's a nest of Nihilists and conspirators. Take away their saints; they don't deserve them.

PRINCE PAUL

Your Highness would punish them more severely by giving them an extra one. Three governors shot in two months! [*Smiles to*

himself.] Sire, permit me to recommend your loyal subject, the Marquis de Poivrard, as the new governor of your Province of Archangel. ACT II.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

[*Hurriedly.*] Sire, I am unfit for this post.

PRINCE PAUL

Marquis, you are too modest. Believe me, there is no man in Russia I would sooner see Governor of Archangel than yourself. [*Whispers to* CZAR.]

CZAR

Quite right, Prince Paul; you are always right. See that the Marquis's letters are made out at once.

PRINCE PAUL

He can start to-night, Sire. I shall really miss you very much, Marquis. I always liked your taste in wine and wives extremely.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

[*To the* CZAR.] Start to-night, Sire? [PRINCE PAUL *whispers to the* CZAR.]

CZAR

Yes, Marquis, to-night; it is better to go at once.

ACT II. PRINCE PAUL

I shall see that Madame la Marquise is not too lonely while you are away; so you need not be alarmed for her.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

[*To* PRINCE PETROVITCH.] I should be more alarmed for myself.

CZAR

The Governor of Archangel shot in his own courtyard by a woman! I'm not safe here. I'm not safe anywhere, with that she devil of the revolution, Vera Sabouroff, here in Moscow. Prince Paul, is that woman still here?

PRINCE PAUL

They tell me she was at the Grand Duke's ball last night. I can hardly believe that; but she certainly had intended to leave for Novgorod to-day, Sire. The police were watching every train for her; but, for some reason or other, she did not go. Some traitor must have warned her. But I shall catch her yet. A chase after a beautiful woman is always exciting.

CZAR

You must hunt her down with bloodhounds, and when she is taken I shall hew her limb from limb. I shall stretch her on the rack till her pale white body is twisted and curled like paper in the fire.

PRINCE PAUL

Oh, we shall have another hunt immediately for her, Sire! Prince Alexis will assist us, I am sure.

CZAREVITCH

You never require any assistance to ruin a woman, Prince Paul.

CZAR

Vera, the Nihilist, in Moscow! O God, were it not better to die at once the dog's death they plot for me than to live as I live now! Never to sleep, or, if I do, to dream such horrid dreams that hell itself were peace when matched with them. To trust none but those I have bought, to buy none worth trusting! To see a traitor in every smile, poison in every dish, a dagger in every

 hand! To lie awake at night, listening from hour to hour for the stealthy creeping of the murderer, for the laying of the damned mine! You are all spies! you are all spies! You worst of all—you, my own son! Which of you is it who hides these bloody proclamations under my own pillow, or at the table where I sit? Which of ye all is the Judas who betrays me? O God! O God! methinks there was a time once, in our war with England, when nothing could make me afraid. [*This with more calm and pathos.*] I have ridden into the crimson heart of war, and borne back an eagle which those wild islanders had taken from us. Men said I was brave then. My father gave me the Iron Cross of Valour. Oh, could he see me now, with this coward's livery ever in my cheek! [*Sinks into his chair.*] I never knew any love when I was a boy. I was ruled by terror myself, how else should I rule now? [*Starts up.*] But I will have revenge; I will have revenge. For every hour I have lain awake at night, waiting for the noose or the dagger, they shall pass years in Siberia, centuries in the mines! Ay! I shall have revenge.

CZAREVITCH

Father! have mercy on the people. Give them what they ask.

PRINCE PAUL

And begin, Sire, with your own head; they have a particular liking for that.

CZAR

The people! the people! A tiger which I have let loose on myself; but I will fight with it to the death. I am done with half measures. I shall crush these Nihilists at a blow. There shall not be a man of them, no, nor a woman either, left alive in Russia. Am I Emperor for nothing, that a woman should hold me at bay? Vera Sabouroff shall be in my power, I swear it, before a week is ended, though I burn my whole city to find her. She shall be flogged by the knout, stifled in the fortress, strangled in the square!

CZAREVITCH

O God!

CZAR

For two years her hands have been clutching at my throat; for two years she has made

 my life a hell; but I shall have revenge. Martial law, Prince, martial law over the whole Empire; that will give me revenge. A good measure, Prince, eh? a good measure.

PRINCE PAUL

And an economical one too, Sire. It will carry off your surplus population in six months, and save you any expense in courts of justice; they will not be needed now.

CZAR

Quite right. There are too many people in Russia, too much money spent on them, too much money on courts of justice. I'll shut them up.

CZAREVITCH

Sire, reflect before——

CZAR

When can you have the proclamations ready, Prince Paul?

PRINCE PAUL

They have been printed for the last six months, Sire. I knew you would need them.

CZAR

That 's good! That 's very good! Let us begin at once. Ah, Prince, if every king in Europe had a minister like you——

CZAREVITCH

There would be less kings in Europe than there are.

CZAR

[*In frightened whisper, to* PRINCE PAUL.] What does he mean? Do you trust him? His prison hasn't cured him yet. Shall I banish him? Shall I [*whispers*] . . .? The Emperor Paul did it. The Empress Catherine there [*points to picture on the wall*] did it. Why shouldn't I?

PRINCE PAUL

Your Majesty, there is no need for alarm. The Prince is a very ingenuous young man. He pretends to be devoted to the people, and lives in a palace; preaches socialism, and draws a salary that would support a province. Some day he 'll find out that the best cure for Republicanism is the Imperial crown, and will cut up the red cap of liberty to make decorations for his Prime Minister.

 CZAR

You are right. If he really loved the people, he could not be my son.

PRINCE PAUL

If he lived with the people for a fortnight, their bad dinners would soon cure him of his democracy. Shall we begin, Sire?

CZAR

At once. Read the proclamation. Gentlemen, be seated. Alexis, Alexis, I say, come and hear it! It will be good practice for you; you will be doing it yourself some day.

CZAREVITCH

I have heard too much of it already. [*Takes his seat at the table.* COUNT ROUVALOFF *whispers to him.*]

CZAR

What are you whispering about there, Count Rouvaloff?

COUNT ROUVALOFF

I was giving his Royal Highness some good advice, your Majesty.

PRINCE PAUL

Count Rouvaloff is the typical spendthrift,

Sire; he is always giving away what he needs most. [*Lays papers before the* CZAR.] I think Sire, you will approve of this:—'Love of the people,' 'Father of his people,' 'Martial law,' and the usual allusions to Providence in the last line. All it requires now is your Imperial Majesty's signature.

CZAREVITCH

Sire!

PRINCE PAUL

[*Hurriedly.*] I promise your Majesty to crush every Nihilist in Russia in six months if you sign this proclamation; every Nihilist in Russia.

CZAR

Say that again! To crush every Nihilist in Russia; to crush this woman, their leader, who makes war upon me in my own city. Prince Paul Maraloffski, I create you Maréchal of the whole Russian Empire to help you to carry out martial law.

CZAR

Give me the proclamation. I will sign it at once.

 PRINCE PAUL

[*Points on paper.*] Here, Sire.

CZAREVITCH

[*Starts up and puts his hands on the paper.*] Stay! I tell you, stay! The priests have taken heaven from the people, and you would take the earth away too.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Hurriedly.*] We have no time, Prince, now. This boy will ruin everything. The pen, Sire.

CZAREVITCH

What! is it so small a thing to strangle a nation, to murder a kingdom, to wreck an empire? Who are we who dare lay this ban of terror on a people? Have we less vices than they have, that we bring them to the bar of judgment before us?

PRINCE PAUL

What a Communist the Prince is! He would have an equal distribution of sin as well as of property.

CZAREVITCH

Warmed by the same sun, nurtured by the same air, fashioned of flesh and blood like to our own, wherein are they different to us,

save that they starve while we surfeit, that they toil while we idle, that they sicken while we poison, that they die while we——

CZAR

How dare——?

CZAREVITCH

I dare all for the people; but you would rob them of common rights of men.

CZAR

The people have no rights.

CZAREVITCH

Then they have great wrongs. Father, they have won your battles for you; from the pine forests of the Baltic to the palms of India they have ridden on victory's mighty wings! Boy as I am in years, I have seen wave after wave of living men sweep up the heights of battle to their death; ay, and snatch perilous conquest from the scales of war when the bloody crescent seemed to shake above our eagles.

CZAR

[*Somewhat moved.*] Those men are dead. What have I to do with them?

ACT II. CZAREVITCH

Nothing! The dead are safe; you cannot harm them now. They sleep their last long sleep. Some in Turkish waters, others by the wind-swept heights of Norway and the Dane! But these, the living, our brothers, what have you done for them? They asked you for bread, you gave them a stone. They sought for freedom, you scourged them with scorpions. You have sown the seeds of this revolution yourself——!

PRINCE PAUL

And are we not cutting down the harvest?

CZAREVITCH

Oh, my brothers! better far that ye had died in the iron hail and screaming shell of battle than to come back to such a doom as this! The beasts of the forests have their lairs, and the wild beasts their caverns, but the people of Russia, conquerors of the world, have not where to lay their heads.

PRINCE PAUL

They have the headsman's block.

CZAREVITCH

The block! Ay! you have killed their

souls at your pleasure, you would kill their bodies now. ACT II.

CZAR

Insolent boy! Have you forgotten who is Emperor of Russia?

CZAREVITCH

No! The people reign now, by the grace of God. You should have been their shepherd; you have fled away like the hireling, and let the wolves in upon them.

CZAR

Take him away! Take him away, Prince Paul!

CZAREVITCH

God hath given this people tongues to speak with; you would cut them out that they may be dumb in their agony, silent in their torture! But He hath given them hands to smite with, and they shall smite! Ay! from the sick and labouring womb of this unhappy land some revolution, like a bloody child, may rise up and slay you.

CZAR

[*Leaping up.*] Devil! Assassin! Why do you beard me thus to my face?

 CZAREVITCH

Because I am a Nihilist! [*The ministers start to their feet; there is a dead silence for a few minutes.*]

CZAR

A Nihilist! a Nihilist! Viper whom I have nurtured, traitor whom I have fondled, is this your bloody secret? Prince Paul Maraloffski, Maréchal of the Russian Empire, arrest the Czarevitch!

MINISTERS

Arrest the Czarevitch!

CZAR

A Nihilist! If you have sown with them, you shall reap with them! If you have talked with them, you shall rot with them! If you have lived with them, with them you shall die!

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Die!

CZAR

A plague on all sons, I say! There should be no more marriages in Russia when one can

breed such Serpents as you are! Arrest the Czarevitch, I say! ACT II.

PRINCE PAUL

Czarevitch! by order of the Emperor, I demand your sword. [CZAREVITCH *gives up sword;* PRINCE PAUL *places it on the table.*]

CZAREVITCH

You will find it unstained by blood.

PRINCE PAUL

Foolish boy! you are not made for a conspirator; you have not learned to hold your tongue. Heroics are out of place in a palace.

CZAR

[*Sinks into his chair with his eyes fixed on the* CZAREVITCH.] O God! My own son against me, my own flesh and blood against me; but I am rid of them all now.

CZAREVITCH

The mighty brotherhood to which I belong has a thousand such as I am, ten thousand better still! [*The* CZAR *starts in his seat.*]

 The star of freedom is risen already, and far off I hear the mighty wave Democracy break on these cursed shores.

PRINCE PAUL

[*To* PRINCE PETROVITCH.] In that case you and I must learn how to swim.

CZAREVITCH

Father, Emperor, Imperial Master, I plead not for my own life, but for the lives of my brothers, the people.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Bitterly.*] Your brothers, the people, Prince, are not content with their own lives, they always want to take their neighbours' too.

CZAR

[*Standing up.*] I am tired of being afraid. I have done with terror now. From this day I proclaim war against the people—war to their annihilation. As they have dealt with me, so shall I deal with them. I shall grind them to powder, and strew their dust upon the air. There shall be a spy in every man's house, a traitor on every hearth, a hangman

in every village, a gibbet in every square. Plague, leprosy, or fever shall be less deadly than my wrath; I will make every frontier a graveyard, every province a lazar-house, and cure the sick by the sword. I shall have peace in Russia, though it be the peace of the dead. Who said I was a coward? Who said I was afraid? See, thus shall I crush this people beneath my feet! [*Takes up sword of* CZAREVITCH *off table and tramples on it.*] ACT II.

CZAREVITCH

Father, beware, the sword you tread on may turn and wound you. The people suffer long, but vengeance comes at last, vengeance with red hands and silent feet.

PRINCE PAUL

Bah! the people are bad shots; they always miss one.

CZAREVITCH

There are times when the people are the instruments of God.

CZAR

Ay! and when kings are God's scourges for the people. Take him away! Take him

ACT II. away! Bring in my guards. [*Enter the Imperial Guard.* CZAR *points to* CZAREVITCH, *who stands alone at the side of the stage.*] We will bring him to prison ourselves: prison! I trust no prison. He would escape and kill me. I will have him shot here, here in the open square by the soldiers. Let me never see his face again. [CZAREVITCH *is being led out.*] No, no, leave him! I don't trust guards. They are all Nihilists! [*To* PRINCE PAUL]. I trust you, you have no mercy. [*Throws window open and goes out on balcony.*]

CZAREVITCH

If I am to die for the people I am ready One Nihilist more or less in Russia, what does that matter?

PRINCE PAUL

[*Looking at his watch.*] The dinner is sure to be spoiled. How annoying politics are; and eldest sons!

VOICE

[*Outside, in the street.*] God save the people! [CZAR *is shot, and staggers back into the room.*]

CZAREVITCH

[*Breaking from the guards, and rushing over.*] Father!

CZAR

Murderer! Murderer! You did it! Murderer! [*Dies.*]

Tableau

END OF ACT II

ACT III

Same scene and business as Act I. Man in yellow dress, with drawn sword, at the door.

Password outside. Væ tyrannis.
Answer. Væ victis [*repeated three times*].

[*Enter* CONSPIRATORS *who form a semicircle, masked and cloaked.*]

PRESIDENT
What hour is it?

FIRST CONSPIRATOR
The hour to strike.

PRESIDENT
What day?

SECOND CONSPIRATOR
The day of Marat.

PRESIDENT
In what month?

THIRD CONSPIRATOR

The month of liberty.

PRESIDENT

What is our duty?

FOURTH CONSPIRATOR

To obey.

PRESIDENT

Our creed?

FIFTH CONSPIRATOR

Parbleu, Monsieur le Président, I never knew you had one.

CONSPIRATORS

A spy! A spy! Unmask! Unmask! A spy!

PRESIDENT

Let the doors be shut. There are others but Nihilists present.

CONSPIRATORS

Unmask! Unmask! Kill him! kill him! [*Masked Conspirator unmasks.*] Prince Paul!

VERA

Devil! Who lured you into the lion's den?

CONSPIRATORS

Kill him! Kill him!

PRINCE PAUL

En vérité, Messieurs, you are not over hospitable in your welcome.

VERA

Welcome! What welcome should we give you but the dagger or the noose?

PRINCE PAUL

I had no idea really that the Nihilists were so exclusive. Let me assure you that if I had not always had an entrée to the very best society, and the very worst conspiracies, I could never have been Prime Minister in Russia.

VERA

The tiger cannot change its nature, nor the snake lose its venom; but are you turned a lover of the people?

PRINCE PAUL

Mon Dieu, non, Mademoiselle! I would much sooner talk scandal in a drawing-room than treason in a cellar. Besides, I hate the common mob, who smell of garlic, smoke

bad tobacco, get up early, and dine off one dish.

PRESIDENT

What have you to gain, then, by a revolution?

PRINCE PAUL

Mon ami, I have nothing left to lose. That scatter-brained boy, this new Czar, has banished me.

VERA

To Siberia?

PRINCE PAUL

No, to Paris. He has confiscated my estates, robbed me of my office and my cook. I have nothing left but my decorations. I am here for revenge.

PRESIDENT

Then you have a right to be one of us. We also meet daily for revenge.

PRINCE PAUL

You want money of course. No one ever joins a conspiracy who has any. Here. [*Throws money on table.*] You have so many spies that I should think you want informa-

 tion. Well, you will find me the best-informed man in Russia on the abuses of our Government. I made them nearly all myself.

VERA

President, I don't trust this man. He has done us too much harm in Russia to let him go in safety.

PRINCE PAUL

Believe me, Mademoiselle, you are wrong. I will be a most valuable addition to your circle; and as for you, gentlemen, if I had not thought that you would be useful to me I shouldn't have risked my neck among you, or dined an hour earlier than usual so as to be in time.

PRESIDENT

Ay, if he had wanted to spy on us, Vera, he wouldn't have come himself.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Aside.*] No; I should have sent my best friend.

PRESIDENT

Besides, Vera, he is just the man to give us

the information we want about some business we have in hand to-night.

VERA

Be it so if you wish it.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, is it your will that Prince Paul Maraloffski be admitted, and take the oath of the Nihilist?

CONSPIRATORS

It is! it is!

PRESIDENT

[*Holding out dagger and a paper.*] Prince Paul, the dagger or the oath?

PRINCE PAUL

[*Smiles sardonically.*] I would sooner annihilate than be annihilated. [*Takes paper.*]

PRESIDENT

Remember: Betray us, and as long as earth holds poison or steel, as long as men can strike or women betray, you shall not escape vengeance. The Nihilists never forget their friends, or forgive their enemies.

 PRINCE PAUL

Really? I did not think you were so civilised.

VERA

[*Pacing up and down behind.*] Why is he not here? He will not keep the crown. I know him well.

PRESIDENT

Sign. [PRINCE PAUL *signs.*] You said you thought we had no creed. You were wrong. Read it!

VERA

This is a dangerous thing, President. What can we do with this man?

PRESIDENT

We can use him. He is of value to us to-night and to-morrow.

VERA

Perhaps there will be no morrow for any of us; but we have given him our word: he is safer here than ever he was in his palace.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Reading.*] 'The rights of humanity'! In the old times men carried out their rights for themselves as they lived, but nowadays every

baby seems born with a social manifesto in its mouth much bigger than itself. 'Nature is not a temple, but a workshop: we demand the right to labour.' Ah, I shall surrender my own rights in that respect.

VERA

[*Pacing up and down behind.*] Oh, will he never come? will he never come?

PRINCE PAUL

'The family as subversive of true socialistic and communal unity is to be annihilated.' Yes, President, I agree completely with Article 5. A family is a terrible incumbrance, especially when one is not married. [*Three knocks at the door.*]

VERA

Alexis at last!

Password

Væ tyrannis!

Answer

Væ victis! [*Enter* MICHAEL STROGANOFF.]

PRESIDENT

Michael, the regicide! Brothers, let us do honour to a man who has killed a king.

 VERA

[*Aside.*] Oh, he will come yet!

PRESIDENT

Michael, you have saved Russia.

MICHAEL

Ay, Russia was free for a moment when the tyrant fell, but the sun of liberty has set again like that false dawn which cheats our eyes in autumn.

PRESIDENT

The dread night of tyranny is not yet past for Russia.

MICHAEL

[*Clutching his knife.*] One more blow, and the end is come indeed.

VERA

[*Aside.*] One more blow! What does he mean? Oh, impossible! but why is he not with us? Alexis! Alexis! why are you not here?

PRESIDENT

But how did you escape, Michael? They said you had been seized.

MICHAEL

I was dressed in the uniform of the Imperial Guard. The Colonel on duty was a brother, and gave me the password. I drove through the troops in safety with it, and, thanks to my good horse, reached the walls before the gates were closed.

PRESIDENT

What a chance his coming out on the balcony was!

MICHAEL

A chance? There is no such thing as chance. It was God's finger led him there.

PRESIDENT

And where have you been these three days?

MICHAEL

Hiding in the house of the priest Nicholas at the cross-roads.

PRESIDENT

Nicholas is an honest man.

MICHAEL

Ay, honest enough for a priest. I am here now for vengeance on a traitor!

 VERA

[*Aside.*] O God, will he never come? Alexis! why are you not here? You cannot have turned traitor!

MICHAEL

[*Seeing* PRINCE PAUL.] Prince Paul Maraloffski here! By St. George, a lucky capture! This must have been Vera's doing. She is the only one who could have lured that serpent into the trap.

PRESIDENT

Prince Paul has just taken the oath.

VERA

Alexis, the Czar, has banished him from Russia.

MICHAEL

Bah! A blind to cheat us. We will keep Prince Paul here, and find some office for him in our reign of terror. He is well accustomed by this time to bloody work.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Approaching* MICHAEL.] That was a long shot of yours, mon camarade.

MICHAEL

I have had a good deal of practice shooting,

since I have been a boy, off your Highness's wild boars.

PRINCE PAUL

Are my gamekeepers like moles, then, always asleep?

MICHAEL

No, Prince. I am one of them; but, like you, I am fond of robbing what I am put to watch.

PRESIDENT

This must be a new atmosphere for you, Prince Paul. We speak the truth to one another here.

PRINCE PAUL

How misleading you must find it! You have an odd medley here, President.

PRESIDENT

You recognise a good many friends, I dare say?

PRINCE PAUL

Yes, there is always more brass than brains in an aristocracy.

PRESIDENT

But you are here yourself?

ACT III. PRINCE PAUL

I? As I cannot be Prime Minister, I must be a Nihilist. There is no alternative.

VERA

O God, will he never come? The hand is on the stroke of the hour. Will he never come?

MICHAEL

[*Aside.*] President, you know what we have to do? 'Tis but a sorry hunter who leaves the wolf cub alive to avenge his father. How are we to get at this boy? It must be to-night. To-morrow he will be throwing some sop of reform to the people, and it will be too late for a republic.

PRINCE PAUL

You are quite right. Good kings are the only dangerous enemies that modern democracy has, and when he has begun by banishing me you may be sure he intends to be a patriot.

MICHAEL

I am sick of patriot kings; what Russia needs is a Republic.

PRINCE PAUL

Messieurs, I have brought you two docu-

ments which I think will interest you—the proclamation this young Czar intends publishing to-morrow, and a plan of the Winter Palace, where he sleeps to-night. ACT III.

[*Hands papers.*]

VERA

I dare not ask them what they are plotting about. Oh, why is Alexis not here?

PRESIDENT

Prince, this is most valuable information. Michael, you were right. If it is not to-night it will be too late. Read that.

MICHAEL

Ah! A loaf of bread flung to a starving nation. A lie to cheat the people. [*Tears it up.*] It must be to-night. I do not believe him. Would he have kept his crown had he loved the people? But how are we to get at him, and shall we who could not bear the scorpions of the father suffer the whips of the son?—no; whatever is, must be destroyed: whatever is, is wrong.

PRINCE PAUL

The key of the private door in the street.

[*Hands key.*]

 PRESIDENT

Prince, we are in your debt.

PRINCE PAUL

[*Smiling.*] The normal condition of the Nihilists.

MICHAEL

Ay, but we are paying our debts off with interest now. Two Emperors in one week. That will make the balance straight. We would have thrown in a Prime Minister if you had not come.

PRINCE PAUL

Ah, I am sorry you told me. It robs my visit of all its picturesqueness and adventure. I thought I was perilling my head by coming here, and you tell me I have saved it. One is sure to be disappointed if one tries to get romance out of modern life.

MICHAEL

It is not so romantic a thing to lose one's head, Prince Paul.

PRINCE PAUL

No, but it must often be very dull to keep it. Don't you find that sometimes?

[*Clock strikes six.*]

VERA

[*Sinking into a seat.*] Oh, it is past the hour! It is past the hour!

MICHAEL

[*To* PRESIDENT.] Remember to-morrow will be too late.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, it is full time. Which of us is absent?

CONSPIRATORS

Alexis! Alexis!

PRESIDENT

Michael, read Rule 7.

MICHAEL

'When any brother shall have disobeyed a summons to be present, the president shall inquire if there is anything alleged against him.'

PRESIDENT

Is there anything against our brother Alexis?

CONSPIRATORS

He wears a crown! He wears a crown!

ACT III. PRESIDENT

Michael, read Article 7 of the Code of Revolution.

MICHAEL

'Between the Nihilists and all men who wear crowns above their fellows, there is war to the death.'

PRESIDENT

Brothers, what say you? Is Alexis, the Czar, guilty or not?

OMNES

He is guilty!

PRESIDENT

What shall the penalty be?

OMNES

Death!

PRESIDENT

Let the lots be prepared; it shall be to-night.

PRINCE PAUL

Ah, this is really interesting! I was getting afraid conspiracies were as dull as courts are.

PROFESSOR MARFA

My forte is more in writing pamphlets than in taking shots. Still a regicide has always a place in history.

MICHAEL

If your pistol is as harmless as your pen, this young tyrant will have a long life.

PRINCE PAUL

You ought to remember, too, Professor, that if you were seized, as you probably would be, and hung, as you certainly would be, there would be nobody left to read your own articles.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, are you ready?

VERA

[*Starting up.*] Not yet! Not yet! I have a word to say.

MICHAEL

[*Aside.*] Plague take her! I knew it would come to this.

VERA

This boy has been our brother. Night after night he has perilled his own life to

ACT III. come here. Night after night, when every street was filled with spies, every house with traitors. Delicately nurtured like a king's son, he has dwelt among us.

PRESIDENT

Ay! under a false name. He lied to us at the beginning. He lies to us now at the end.

VERA

I swear he is true. There is not a man here who does not owe him his life a thousand times. When the bloodhounds were on us that night, who saved us from arrest, torture, flogging, death, but he ye seek to kill?——

MICHAEL

To kill all tyrants is our mission!

VERA

He is no tyrant. I know him well! He loves the people.

PRESIDENT

We know him too; he is a traitor.

VERA

A traitor! Three days ago he could have

betrayed every man of you here, and the gibbet would have been your doom. He gave you all your lives once. Give him a little time—a week, a month, a few days; but now!—O God, not now!

CONSPIRATORS

[*Brandishing daggers.*] To-night! to-night! to-night!

VERA

Peace, you gorgèd adders! peace!

MICHAEL

What, are we not here to annihilate? Shall we not keep our oath?

VERA

Your oath! your oath! Greedy that you are of gain, every man's hand lusting for his neighbour's pelf, every heart set on pillage and rapine; who, of ye all, if the crown were set on his head, would give an empire up for the mob to scramble for? The people are not yet fit for a republic in Russia.

PRESIDENT

Every nation is fit for a republic.

MICHAEL

The man is a tyrant.

VERA

A tyrant! Hath he not dismissed his evil counsellors. That ill-omened raven of his father's life hath had his wings clipped and his claws pared, and comes to us croaking for revenge. Oh, have mercy on him! Give him a week to live!

PRESIDENT

Vera, pleading for a king!

VERA

[*Proudly.*] I plead not for a king, but for a brother.

MICHAEL

For a traitor to his oath, a coward who should have flung the purple back to the fools that gave it him. No, Vera, no. The brood of men is not yet dead, nor the dull earth grown sick of child-bearing. No crowned man in Russia shall pollute God's air by living.

PRESIDENT

You bade us try you once. We have tried you, and you are found wanting.

MICHAEL

Vera, I am not blind; I know your secret. You love this boy, this young prince with his pretty face, his curled hair, his soft white hands. Fool that you are, dupe of a lying tongue, do you know what he would have done to you, this boy you think loved you? He would have made you his mistress, used your body at his pleasure, thrown you away when he was wearied of you; you, the priestess of liberty, the flame of revolution, the torch of democracy.

VERA

What he would have done to me matters little. To the people, at least, he will be true. He loves the people; at least, he loves liberty.

PRESIDENT

So, he would play the citizen-king, would he, while we starve? Would flatter us with sweet speeches, would cheat us with promises like his father, would lie to us as his whole race have lied.

MICHAEL

And you whose very name made every

 despot tremble for his life, you, Vera Sabouroff, you would betray liberty for a lover and the people for a paramour!

CONSPIRATORS

Traitress! Draw the lots; draw the lots!

VERA

In thy throat thou liest, Michael! I love him not. He loves me not.

MICHAEL

You love him not? Shall he not die then?

VERA

[*With an effort, clenching her hands.*] Ay, it is right that he should die. He hath broken his oath. There should be no crowned man in Europe. Have I not sworn it? To be strong, our new republic should be drunk with the blood of kings. He hath broken his oath. As the father died so let the son die too. Yet not to-night, not to-night. Russia, that hath borne her centuries of wrong, can wait a week for liberty. Give him a week.

PRESIDENT

We will have none of you! Begone from us to this boy you love.

MICHAEL

Though I find him in your arms I shall kill him.

CONSPIRATORS

To-night! To-night! To-night!

MICHAEL

[*Holding up his hand.*] A moment! I have something to say. [*Approaches* VERA; *speaks very slowly.*] Vera Sabouroff, have you forgotten your brother? [*Pauses to see effect;* VERA *starts.*] Have you forgotten that young face, pale with famine; those young limbs twisted with torture; the iron chains they made him walk in? What week of liberty did they give him? What pity did they show him for a day? [VERA *falls in a chair.*] Oh! you could talk glibly enough then of vengeance, glibly enough of liberty. When you said you would come to Moscow, your old father caught you by the knees and begged you not to leave him to die childless

 and alone. I seem to hear his cries still ringing in my ears, but you were as deaf to him as the rocks on the roadside. You left your father that night, and three weeks after he died of a broken heart. You wrote to me to follow you here. I did so; first because I loved you; but you soon cured me of that; whatever gentle feeling, whatever pity, whatever love, whatever humanity, was in my heart you withered up and destroyed, as the canker worm eats the corn. You bade me cast out love from my breast as a vile thing, you turned my hand to iron, and my heart to stone; you told me to live for freedom and revenge. I have done so. But you, what have you done?

VERA

Let the lots be drawn! [CONSPIRATORS *applaud.*]

PRINCE PAUL

[*Aside.*] Ah, the Grand Duke will come to the throne sooner than he expected. He is sure to make a good king under my guidance. He is so cruel to animals, and never keeps his word

MICHAEL

Now you are yourself at last, Vera.

VERA

[*Standing motionless in the middle.*] The lots, I say, the lots! I am no woman now. My blood seems turned to gall; my heart is as cold as steel is; my hand shall be more deadly. From the desert and the tomb the voice of my prisoned brother cries aloud, and bids me strike one blow for liberty. The lots, I say, the lots!

PRESIDENT

Are ready. Michael, you have the right to draw first: you are a regicide.

VERA

O God, into my hands! Into my hands! [*They draw the lots from a bowl surmounted by a skull.*]

PRESIDENT

Open your lots.

VERA

[*Opening her lot.*] The lot is mine! See, the bloody sign upon it! Dmitri, my brother, you shall have your revenge now.

 PRESIDENT

Vera Sabouroff, you are chosen to be a regicide. God has been good to you. The dagger or the poison? [*Offers her dagger and vial.*]

VERA

I can trust my hand better with the dagger; it never fails. [*Takes dagger.*] I shall stab him to the heart, as he has stabbed me. Traitor, to leave us for a ribbon, a gaud, a bauble, to lie to me every day he came here, to forget us in an hour. Michael was right, he loved me not, nor the people either. Methinks that if I was a mother and bore a man-child, I would poison my breast against him, lest he might grow to a traitor or to a king. [PRINCE PAUL *whispers to the* PRESIDENT.]

PRESIDENT

Ay, Prince Paul, that is the best way. Vera, the Czar sleeps to-night in his own room in the north wing of the palace. Here is a key of the private door in the street. The passwords of the guards will be given to you. His own servants will be drugged. You will find him alone.

VERA

It is well. I shall not fail.

PRESIDENT

We will wait outside in the Place Saint Isaac, under the window. As the clock strikes twelve from the tower of St. Nicholas you will give us the sign that the dog is dead.

VERA

And what shall the sign be?

PRESIDENT

You are to throw us out the bloody dagger.

MICHAEL

Dripping with the traitor's life.

PRESIDENT

Else we shall know that you have been seized, and we will burst our way in, drag you from his guards.

MICHAEL

And kill him in the midst of them.

PRESIDENT

Michael, you will lead us?

MICHAEL

Ay, I shall lead you. See that your hand fails you not, Vera Sabouroff.

VERA

Fool, is it so hard a thing to kill one's enemy?

PRINCE PAUL

[*Aside.*] This is the ninth conspiracy I have been in in Russia. They always end in a 'voyage en Sibérie' for my friends and a new decoration for myself.

MICHAEL

It is your last conspiracy, Prince.

PRESIDENT

At twelve o'clock, the bloody dagger.

VERA

Ay, red with the blood of that false heart. I shall not forget it. [*Standing in middle of stage.*] To strangle whatever nature is in me, neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor to be pitied. Ay! it is an oath, an oath. Methinks the spirit of Charlotte Corday has entered my soul now. I shall carve my name on the world, and be ranked among the

great heroines. Ay! the spirit of Charlotte Corday beats in each petty vein, and nerves my woman's hand to strike, as I have nerved my woman's heart to hate. Though he laugh in his dreams I shall not falter. Though he sleep peacefully I shall not miss my blow. Be glad, my brother, in your stifled cell; be glad and laugh to-night. To-night this new-fledged Czar shall post with bloody feet to hell, and greet his father there! This Czar! O traitor, liar, false to his oath, false to me! To play the patriot among us, and now to wear a crown; to sell us, like Judas, for thirty silver pieces, to betray us with a kiss! [*With more passion.*] O Liberty, O mighty mother of eternal time, thy robe is purple with the blood of those who have died for thee! Thy throne is the Calvary of the people, thy crown the crown of thorns. O crucified mother, the despot has driven a nail through thy right hand, and the tyrant through thy left! Thy feet are pierced with their iron. When thou wert athirst thou calledst on the priests for water, and they gave thee bitter drink. They thrust a sword into thy side. They mocked thee in thine

ACT III. agony of age on age. Here, on thy altar, O Liberty, do I dedicate myself to thy service; do with me as thou wilt! [*Brandishing the dagger.*] The end has come now, and by thy sacred wounds, O crucified mother, O Liberty, I swear that Russia shall be saved!

Curtain

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

SCENE

Antechamber of the Czar's private room. Large window at the back, with drawn curtains over it.

Present.—PRINCE PETROVITCH. BARON RAFF. MARQUIS DE POIVRARD. COUNT ROUVALOFF.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

He is beginning well, this young Czar.

BARON RAFF

[*Shrugs his shoulders.*] All young Czars do begin well.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

And end badly.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

Well, I have no right to complain. He has done me one good service, at any rate.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Cancelled your appointment to Archangel, I suppose?

ACT IV. MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

Yes; my head wouldn't have been safe there for an hour.

[*Enter* GENERAL KOTEMKIN.]

BARON RAFF

Ah! General, any more news of our romantic young Emperor?

GENERAL KOTEMKIN

You are quite right to call him romantic, Baron; a week ago I found him amusing himself in a garret with a company of strolling players; to-day his whim is all the convicts in Siberia are to be recalled, and the political prisoners, as he calls them, amnestied.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Political prisoners! Why, half of them are no better than common murderers!

COUNT ROUVALOFF

And the other half much worse?

BARON RAFF

Oh, you wrong them, surely, Count. Wholesale trade has always been more respectable than retail.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

But he is really too romantic. He objected

yesterday to my having the monopoly of the salt tax. He said the people had a right to have cheap salt. ACT IV.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

Oh, that 's nothing; but he actually disapproved of a State banquet every night because there is a famine in the Southern provinces. [*The young* CZAR *enters unobserved, and overhears the rest.*]

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Quelle bêtise! The more starvation there is among the people the better. It teaches them self-denial, an excellent virtue, Baron.

BARON RAFF

I have often heard so.

GENERAL KOTEMKIN

He talked of a Parliament, too, in Russia, and said the people should have deputies to represent them.

BARON RAFF

As if there was not enough brawling in the streets already, but we must give the people a room to do it in But, Messieurs, the worst

is yet to come. He threatens a complete reform of the public service on the ground that the people are too heavily taxed.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

He can't be serious there. What is the use of the people except for us to get money out of? But talking of the taxes, my dear Baron, you must really let me have forty thousand roubles to-morrow; my wife says she must have a new diamond bracelet.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

[*Aside* to BARON RAFF.] Ah, to match the one Prince Paul gave her last week, I suppose.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

I must have sixty thousand roubles at once, Baron. My son is overwhelmed with debts of honour which he can't pay.

BARON RAFF

What an excellent son to imitate his father so carefully!

GENERAL KOTEMKIN

You are always getting money. I never get a single kopeck I have not got a right to.

It's unbearable; it's ridiculous! My nephew is going to be married. I must get his dowry for him.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

My dear General, your nephew must be a perfect Turk. He seems to get married three times a week regularly.

GENERAL KOTEMKIN

Well, he wants a dowry to console him.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

I am sick of town. I want a house in the country.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

I am sick of the country. I want a house in town.

BARON RAFF

Gentlemen, I am extremely sorry for you. It is out of the question.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

But my son, Baron?

GENERAL KOTEMKIN

But my nephew?

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

But my house in town?

ACT IV. COUNT ROUVALOFF

But my house in the country?

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

But my wife's diamond bracelet?

BARON RAFF

Gentlemen, impossible! The old régime in Russia is dead; the funeral begins to-day.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

Then I shall wait for the resurrection.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Yes, but, *en attendant*, what are we to do?

BARON RAFF

What have we always done in Russia when a Czar suggests reform?—nothing. You forget we are diplomatists. Men of thought should have nothing to do with action. Reforms in Russia are very tragic, but they always end in a farce.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

I wish Prince Paul were here. By the by, I think this boy is rather ungrateful to him. If that clever old Prince had not proclaimed him Emperor at once without giving him time to think about it, he would have

given up his crown, I believe, to the first cobbler he met in the street.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

But do you think, Baron, that Prince Paul is really going?

BARON RAFF

He is exiled.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Yes; but is he going?

BARON RAFF

I am sure of it; at least he told me he had sent two telegrams already to Paris about his dinner.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

Ah! that settles the matter.

CZAR

[*Coming forward.*] Prince Paul had better send a third telegram and order [*counting them*] six extra places.

BARON RAFF

The devil!

CZAR

No, Baron, the Czar. Traitors! There

ACT IV. would be no bad kings in the world if there were no bad ministers like you. It is men such as you are who wreck mighty empires on the rock of their own greatness. Our mother, Russia, hath no need of such unnatural sons. You can make no atonement now; it is too late for that. The grave cannot give back your dead, nor the gibbet your martyrs, but I shall be more merciful to you. I give you your lives! That is the curse I would lay on you. But if there is a man of you found in Moscow by to-morrow night your heads will be off your shoulders.

BARON RAFF

You remind us wonderfully, Sire, of your Imperial father.

CZAR

I banish you all from Russia. Your estates are confiscated to the people. You may carry your titles with you. Reforms in Russia, Baron, always end in a farce. You will have a good opportunity, Prince Petrovitch, of practising self-denial, that excellent virtue! that excellent virtue! So, Baron, you think a Parliament in Russia would be merely

a place for brawling. Well, I will see that the reports of each session are sent to you regularly.

BARON RAFF

Sire, you are adding another horror to exile.

CZAR

But you will have such time for literature now. You forget you are diplomatists. Men of thought should have nothing to do with action.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Sire, we did but jest.

CZAR

Then I banish you for your bad jokes. Bon voyage, Messieurs. If you value your lives you will catch the first train for Paris. [*Exeunt Ministers.*] Russia is well rid of such men as these. They are the jackals that follow in the lion's track. They have no courage themselves except to pillage and rob. But for these men and for Prince Paul my father would have been a good king, would not have died so horribly as he did die. How

ACT IV. strange it is, the most real parts of one's life always seem to be a dream! The council, the fearful law which was to kill the people, the arrest, the cry in the court-yard, the pistol-shot, my father's bloody hands, and then the crown! One can live for years sometimes without living at all, and then all life comes crowding into one single hour. I had no time to think. Before my father's hideous shriek of death had died in my ears I found this crown on my head, the purple robe around me, and heard myself called a king. I would have given it up all then; it seemed nothing to me then; but now, can I give it up now? Well, Colonel, well? [*Enter* COLONEL OF THE GUARD.]

COLONEL

What password does your Imperial Majesty desire should be given to-night?

CZAR

Password?

COLONEL

For the cordon of guards, Sire, on night duty around the palace.

CZAR

You can dismiss them. I have no need of them. [*Exit* COLONEL.] [*Goes to the crown lying on the table.*] What subtle potency lies hidden in this gaudy bauble, the crown, that makes one feel like a god when one wears it? To hold in one's hand this little fiery-coloured world, to reach out one's arm to earth's uttermost limit, to girdle the seas with one's galley; to make the land a highway for one's hosts; this is to wear a crown! to wear a crown! The meanest serf in Russia who is loved is better crowned than I. How love outweighs the balance! How poor appears the widest empire of this golden world when matched with love! Pent up in this palace, with spies dogging every step, I have heard nothing of her; I have not seen her once since that fearful hour, three days ago, when I found myself suddenly the Czar of this wide waste, Russia. Oh, could I see her for a moment; tell her now the secret of my life I have never dared to utter before; tell her why I wear this crown, when I have sworn eternal war against all crowned men! There was a meeting to-night. I received

 my summons by an unknown hand; but how could I go? I, who have broken my oath! who have broken my oath! [*Enter* PAGE.]

PAGE

It is after eleven, Sire. Shall I take the first watch in your room to-night?

CZAR

Why should you watch me, boy? The stars are my best sentinels.

PAGE

It was your Imperial father's wish, Sire, never to be left alone while he slept.

CZAR

My father was troubled with bad dreams. Go, get to your bed, boy; it is nigh on midnight, and these late hours will spoil those red cheeks. [PAGE *tries to kiss his hand.*] Nay, nay; we have played together too often for that. Oh, to breathe the same air as her, and not to see her! the light seems to have gone from my life, the sun vanished from my day.

PAGE

Sire—Alexis—let me stay with you to-

night! There is some danger over you; I feel there is. ACT IV.

CZAR

What should I fear? I have banished all my enemies from Russia. Set the brazier here, by me; it is very cold, and I would sit by it for a time. Go, boy, go; I have much to think about to-night. [*Goes to back of stage, draws aside the curtain. View of Moscow by moonlight.*] The snow has fallen heavily since sunset. How white and cold my city looks under this pale moon! And yet, what hot and fiery hearts beat in this icy Russia, for all its frost and snow. Oh, to see her for a moment; to tell her all; to tell her why I am a king! But she does not doubt me; she said she would trust in me. Though I have broken my oath, she will have trust. It is very cold. Where is my cloak? I shall sleep for an hour. Then I have ordered my sledge, and, though I die for it, I shall see Vera to-night. Did I not bid thee go, boy? What! must I play the tyrant so soon? Go, go! I cannot live without seeing her. My horses will be here in an hour; one hour

 between me and love! How heavy this charcoal fire smells. [*Exit the* PAGE. *Lies down on a couch beside brazier.*]

[*Enter* VERA, *in a black cloak.*]

VERA

Asleep! God, thou art good! Who shall deliver him from my hands now? This is he! The democrat who would make himself a king, the republican who hath worn a crown, the traitor who hath lied to us. Michael was right. He loved not the people. He loved me not. [*Bends over him.*] Oh, why should such deadly poison lie in such sweet lips? Was there not gold enough in his hair before, but he should tarnish it with this crown? But my day has come now; the day of the people, of liberty, has come! Your day, my brother, has come! Though I have strangled whatever nature is in me, I did not think it had been so easy to kill. One blow and it is over, and I can wash my hands in water afterwards, I can wash my hands afterwards. Come, I shall save Russia. I have sworn it. [*Raises the dagger to strike.*]

CZAR

[*Starting up, seizes her by both hands.*] Vera, you here! My dream was no dream at all. Why have you left me three days alone, when I most needed you? O God, you think I am a traitor, a liar, a king? I am, for love of you. Vera, it was for you I broke my oath and wear my father's crown. I would lay at your feet this mighty Russia, which you and I have loved so well; would give you this earth as your footstool; set this crown on your head. The people will love us. We will rule them by love, as a father rules his children. There shall be liberty in Russia for every man to think as his heart bids him; liberty for men to speak as they think. I have banished the wolves that preyed on us; I have brought back your brother from Siberia; I have opened the blackened jaws of the mine. The courier is already on his way; within a week Dmitri and all those with him will be back in their own land. The people shall be free — are free now When they gave me this crown first, I would have flung it back to them, had it not been for you, Vera. O God! It is men's custom

ACT IV. in Russia to bring gifts to those they love. I said, I will bring to the woman I love a people, an empire, a world! Vera, it is for you, for you alone, I kept this crown; for you alone I am a king. Oh, I have loved you better than my oath! Why will you not speak to me? You love me not! You love me not! You have come to warn me of some plot against my life. What is life worth to me without you? [CONSPIRATORS *murmur outside.*]

VERA

Oh, lost! lost! lost!

CZAR

Nay, you are safe here. It wants five hours still of dawn. To-morrow, I will lead you forth to the whole people——

VERA

To-morrow——!

CZAR

Will crown you with my own hands as Empress in that great cathedral which my fathers built.

VERA

[*Loosens her hands violently from him, and starts up.*] I am a Nihilist! I cannot wear a crown!

CZAR

[*Falls at her feet.*] I am no king now. I am only a boy who has loved you better than his honour, better than his oath. For love of the people I would have been a patriot. For love of you I have been a traitor. Let us go forth together, we will live amongst the common people. I am no king. I will toil for you like the peasant or the serf. Oh, love me a little too! [CONSPIRATORS *murmur outside.*]

VERA

[*Clutching dagger.*] To strangle whatever nature is in me, neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor——Oh, I am a woman! God help me, I am a woman! O Alexis! I too have broken my oath; I am a traitor. I love. Oh, do not speak, do not speak—[*Kisses his lips*]—the first, the last time. [*He clasps her in his arms; they sit on the couch together.*]

 CZAR

I could die now.

VERA

What does death do in thy lips? Thy life, thy love are enemies of death. Speak not of death. Not yet, not yet.

CZAR

I know not why death came into my heart. Perchance the cup of life is filled too full of pleasure to endure. This is our wedding night.

VERA

Our wedding night!

CZAR

And if death came himself, methinks that I could kiss his pallid mouth, and suck sweet poison from it.

VERA

Our wedding night! Nay, nay. Death should not sit at the feast. There is no such thing as death.

CZAR

There shall not be for us. [CONSPIRATORS *murmur outside.*]

VERA

What is that? Did you not hear something?

CZAR

Only your voice, that fowler's note which lures my heart away like a poor bird upon the limed twig.

VERA

Methought that some one laughed.

CZAR

It was but the wind and rain; the night is full of storm. [CONSPIRATORS *murmur outside.*]

VERA

It should be so, indeed. Oh, where are your guards? where are your guards?

CZAR

Where should they be but at home? I shall not live pent round by sword and steel. The love of a people is a king's best bodyguard.

VERA

The love of a people!

ACT IV. CZAR

Sweet, you are safe here. Nothing can harm you here. O love, I knew you trusted me! You said you would have trust.

VERA

I have had trust O love, the past seems but some dull, grey dream from which our souls have wakened. This is life at last.

CZAR

Ay, life at last.

VERA

Our wedding night! Oh, let me drink my fill of love to-night! Nay, sweet, not yet, not yet. How still it is, and yet methinks the air is full of music. It is some nightingale who, wearying of the south, has come to sing in this bleak north to lovers such as we. It is the nightingale. Dost thou not hear it?

CZAR

O sweet, mine ears are clogged to all sweet sounds save thine own voice, and mine eyes blinded to all sights but thee, else had I heard that nightingale, and seen the golden-

vestured morning sun itself steal from its sombre east before its time, for jealousy that thou art twice as fair.

VERA

Yet would that thou hadst heard the nightingale. Methinks that bird will never sing again.

CZAR

It is no nightingale. 'Tis love himself singing for very ecstasy of joy that thou art changed into his votaress. [*Clock begins striking twelve.*] Oh, listen, sweet, it is the lover's hour. Come, let us stand without, and hear the midnight answered from tower to tower over the wide white town. Our wedding night! What is that? What is that? [*Loud murmurs of* CONSPIRATORS *in the street.*]

VERA

[*Breaks from him and rushes across the stage.*] The wedding guests are here already! Ay! you shall have your sign! [*Stabs herself.*] You shall have your sign! [*Rushes to the window.*]

ACT IV. CZAR

[*Intercepts her by rushing between her and window, and snatches dagger out of her hand.*] Vera!

VERA

[*Clinging to him.*] Give me back the dagger! Give me back the dagger! There are men in the street who seek your life! Your guards have betrayed you! This bloody dagger is the signal that you are dead. [CONSPIRATORS *begin to shout below in the street.*] Oh, there is not a moment to be lost! Throw it out! Throw it out! Nothing can save me now; this dagger is poisoned! I feel death already in my heart. There was no other way but this.

CZAR

[*Holding dagger out of her reach.*] Death is in my heart too; we shall die together!

VERA

Oh, love! love! love! be merciful to me! The wolves are hot upon you!—you must live for liberty, for Russia, for me! Oh, you do not love me! You offered me an empire

once! Give me this dagger, now! Oh, you are cruel! My life for yours! What does it matter? [*Loud shout in the street, 'Vera! Vera! To the rescue! To the rescue!'*] ACT IV.

CZAR

The bitterness of death is past for me.

VERA

Oh, they are breaking in below! See! The bloody man behind you! [CZAR *turns round for an instant.*] Ah! [VERA *snatches dagger and flings it out of window.*]

CONSPIRATORS

[*Below.*] Long live the people!

CZAR

What have you done?

VERA

I have saved Russia! [*Dies.*]

Tableau

APPENDIX

SALOMÉ

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF OSCAR WILDE

BY

LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

HEROD ANTIPAS, Tetrarch of Judæa.

JOKANAAN, the Prophet.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN, Captain of the Guard.

TIGELLINUS, a Young Roman.

A CAPPADOCIAN.

A NUBIAN.

FIRST SOLDIER.

SECOND SOLDIER.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS.

JEWS, NAZARENES, ETC.

A SLAVE.

NAAMAN, the Executioner.

HERODIAS, Wife of the Tetrarch.

SALOME, Daughter of Herodias.

THE SLAVES OF SALOME.

SCENE

[*A great terrace in the Palace of* HEROD, *set above the banqueting-hall. Some soldiers are leaning over the balcony. To the right there is a gigantic staircase, to the left, at the back, an old cistern surrounded by a wall of green bronze. The moon is shining very brightly.*]

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

How beautiful is the Princess Salomé to-night!

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

Look at the moon. How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman. One might fancy she was looking for dead things.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

She has a strange look. She is like a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver. She is like a princess who has little white doves for feet. One might fancy she was dancing.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

She is like a woman who is dead. She moves very slowly.

[*Noise in the banqueting-hall.*]

FIRST SOLDIER
What an uproar! Who are those wild beasts howling?

SECOND SOLDIER
The Jews. They are always like that. They are disputing about their religion.

FIRST SOLDIER
Why do they dispute about their religion?

SECOND SOLDIER
I cannot tell. They are always doing it. The Pharisees, for instance, say that there are angels, and the Sadducees declare that angels do not exist.

FIRST SOLDIER
I think it is ridiculous to dispute about such things.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN
How beautiful is the Princess Salomé to-night!

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS
You are always looking at her. You look at her too much. It is dangerous to look at people in such fashion. Something terrible may happen.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN
She is very beautiful to-night.

FIRST SOLDIER
The Tetrarch has a sombre aspect.

SECOND SOLDIER
Yes; he has a sombre aspect.

FIRST SOLDIER
He is looking at something.

SECOND SOLDIER
He is looking at some one.

FIRST SOLDIER
At whom is he looking?

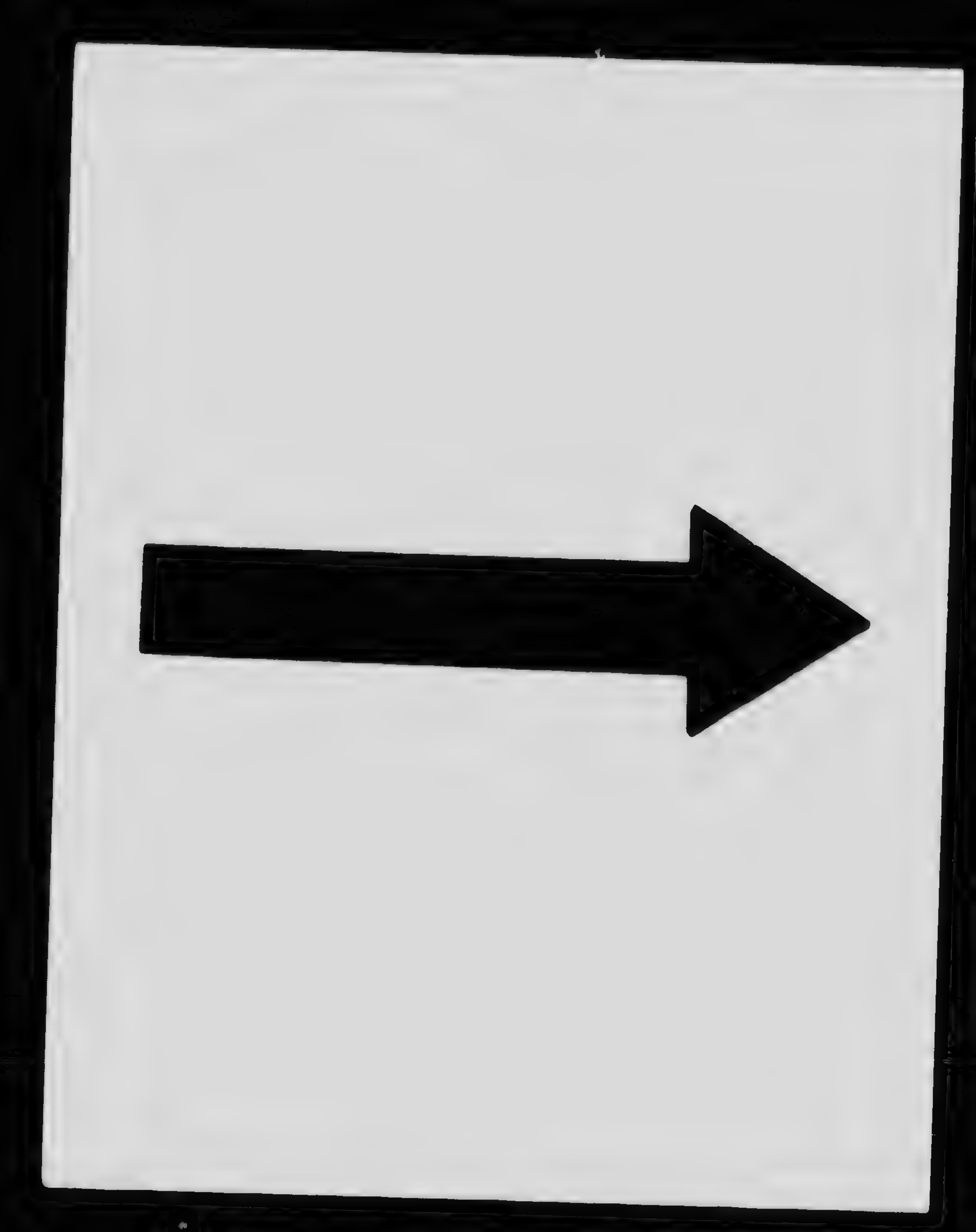
SECOND SOLDIER
I cannot tell.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN
How pale the Princess is! Never have I seen her so pale. She is like the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS
You must not look at her. You look too much at her.

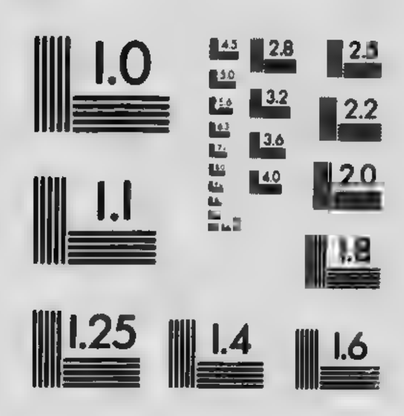
FIRST SOLDIER
Herodias has filled the cup of the Tetrarch.

THE CAPPADOCIAN
Is that the Queen Herodias, she who wears a black mitre sewed with pearls, and whose hair is powdered with blue dust?



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)





FIRST SOLDIER
Yes; that is Herodias, the Tetrarch's wife.

SECOND SOLDIER
The Tetrarch is very fond of wine. He has wine of three sorts. One which is brought from the Island of Samothrace, and is purple like the cloak of Cæsar.

THE CAPPADOCIAN
I have never seen Cæsar.

SECOND SOLDIER
Another that comes from a town called Cyprus, and is as yellow as gold.

THE CAPPADOCIAN
I love gold.

SECOND SOLDIER
And the third is a wine of Sicily. That wine is as red as blood.

THE NUBIAN
The gods of my country are very fond. Twice in the year we sacrifice to them young men and maidens; fifty young men and a hundred maidens. But I am afraid that we never give them quite enough, for they are very harsh to us.

THE CAPPADOCIAN
In my country there are no gods left. The Romans have driven them out. There are some who

say that they have hidden themselves in the mountains, but I do not believe it. Three nights I have been on the mountains seeking them everywhere. I did not find them. And at last I called them by their names, and they did not come. I think they are dead.

FIRST SOLDIER

The Jews worship a God that one cannot see.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

I cannot understand that.

FIRST SOLDIER

In fact, they only believe in things that one cannot see.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

That seems to me altogether ridiculous.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN

After me shall come another mightier than I. I am not worthy so much as to unloose the latchet of his shoes. When he cometh, the solitary places shall be glad. They shall blossom like the rose. The eyes of the blind shall see the day, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened. The suckling child shall put his hand upon the dragon's lair, he shall lead the lions by their manes.

SECOND SOLDIER

Make him be silent. He is always saying ridiculous things.

FIRST SOLDIER

No, no. He is a holy man. He is very gentle, too. Every day, when I give him to eat he thanks me.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

Who is he?

FIRST SOLDIER

A prophet.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

What is his name?

FIRST SOLDIER

Jokanaan.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

Whence comes he?

FIRST SOLDIER

From the desert where he fed on locusts and wild honey. He was clothed in camel's hair, and round his loins he had a leathern belt. He was very terrible to look upon. A great multitude used to follow him. He even had disciples.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

What is he talking of?

FIRST SOLDIER

We can never tell. Sometimes he says things that affright one, but it is impossible to understand what he says.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

May one see him?

FIRST SOLDIER

No. The Tetrarch has forbidden it.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

The Princess has hidden her face behind her fan! Her little white hands are fluttering like doves that fly to their dove-cots. They are like white butterflies. They are just like white butterflies.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

What is that to you? Why do you look at her? You must not look at her. . . . Something terrible may happen.

THE CAPPADOCIAN [*Pointing to the cistern*]

What a strange prison!

SECOND SOLDIER

It is an old cistern.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

An old cistern! That must be a poisonous place in which to dwell!

SECOND SOLDIER

Oh no! For instance, the Tetrarch's brother, his elder brother, the first husband of Herodias the Queen, was imprisoned there for twelve years. It did not kill him. At the end of the twelve years he had to be strangled.

THE CAPPADOCIAN
Strangled? Who dared to do that?

SECOND SOLDIER
[*Pointing to the Executioner, a huge Negro*]
That man yonder, Naaman.

THE CAPPADOCIAN
He was not afraid?

SECOND SOLDIER
Oh no! The Tetrarch sent him the ring.

THE CAPPADOCIAN
What ring?

SECOND SOLDIER
The death-ring. So he was not afraid.

THE CAPPADOCIAN
Yet it is a terrible thing to strangle a king.

FIRST SOLDIER
Why? Kings have but one neck, like other folk.

THE CAPPADOCIAN
I think it terrible.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN
The Princess is getting up! She is leaving the table! She looks very troubled. Ah, she is coming this way. Yes, she is coming towards us. How pale she is! Never have I seen her so pale.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

I pray you not to look at her.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

She is like a dove that has strayed. . . . She is like a narcissus trembling in the wind. . . . She is like a silver flower.

[*Enter* SALOMÉ.]

SALOMÉ

I will not stay. I cannot stay. Why does the Tetrarch look at me all the while with his mole's eyes under his shaking eyelids? It is strange that the husband of my mother looks at me like that. I know not what it means. Of a truth I know it too well.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

You have left the feast, Princess?

SALOMÉ

How sweet is the air here! I can breathe here! Within there are Jews from Jerusalem who are tearing each other in pieces over their foolish ceremonies, and barbarians who drink and drink, and spill their wine on the pavement, and Greeks from Smyrna with painted eyes and painted cheeks, and frizzed hair curled in columns, and Egyptians silent and subtle, with long nails of jade and russet cloaks, and Romans brutal and coarse, with their uncouth jargon. Ah! how I loathe the Romans! They are rough and

common, and they give themselves the airs of noble lords.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Will you be seated, Princess?

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

Why do you speak to her? Oh! something terrible will happen. Why do you look at her?

SALOMÉ

How good to see the moon! She is like a little piece of money, a little silver flower. She is cold and chaste. I am sure she is a virgin. Yes, she is a virgin. She has never defiled herself. She has never abandoned herself to men, like the other goddesses.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN

Behold! the Lord hath come. The son of man is at hand. The centaurs have hidden themselves in the rivers, and the nymphs have left the rivers, and are lying beneath the leaves of the forest.

SALOMÉ

Who was that who cried out?

SECOND SOLDIER

The prophet, Princess.

SALOMÉ

Ah, the prophet! He of whom the Tetrarch is afraid?

SECOND SOLDIER

We know nothing of that, Princess. It was the prophet Jokanaan who cried out.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Is it your pleasure that I bid them bring your litter, Princess? The night is fair in the garden.

SALOMÉ

He says terrible things about my mother, does he not?

SECOND SOLDIER

We never understand what he says, Princess.

SALOMÉ

Yes; he says terrible things about her.

[*Enter a Slave.*]

THE SLAVE

Princess, the Tetrarch prays you to return to the feast.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Pardon me, Princess, but if you return not some misfortune may happen.

SALOMÉ

Is he an old man, this prophet?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Princess, it were better to return. Suffer me to lead you in.

SALOMÉ

This prophet . . . is he an old man?

FIRST SOLDIER

No, Princess, he is quite young.

SECOND SOLDIER

One cannot be sure. There are those who say he is Elias.

SALOMÉ

Who is Elias?

SECOND SOLDIER

A prophet of this country in bygone days, Princess.

THE SLAVE

What answer may I give the Tetrarch from the Princess?

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN

Rejoice not, O land of Palestine, because the rod of him who smote thee is broken. For from the seed of the serpent shall come a basilisk, and that which is born of it shall devour the birds.

SALOMÉ

What a strange voice! I would speak with him.

FIRST SOLDIER

I fear it may not be, Princess. The Tetrarch does not suffer any one to speak with him. He has even forbidden the high priest to speak with him.

SALOMÉ

I desire to speak with him.

FIRST SOLDIER

It is impossible, Princess.

SALOMÉ

I will speak with him.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Would it not be better to return to the banquet?

SALOMÉ

Bring forth this prophet. [*Exit the slave.*]

FIRST SOLDIER

We dare not, Princess.

SALOMÉ [*Approaching the cistern and looking down into it*]

How black it is, down there! It must be terrible to be in so black a hole! It is like a tomb. . . . [*To the soldiers.*] Did you not hear me? Bring out the prophet. I would look on him.

SECOND SOLDIER

Princess, I beg you do not require this of us.

SALOMÉ

You are making me wait upon your pleasure.

FIRST SOLDIER

Princess, our lives belong to you, but we cannot do

what you have asked of us. And indeed, it is not of us that you should ask this thing.

SALOMÉ [*Looking at the young Syrian*]
Ah!

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS
Oh! what is going to happen? I am sure that something terrible will happen.

SALOMÉ [*Going up to the young Syrian*]
Thou wilt do this thing for me, wilt thou not, Narraboth? Thou wilt do this thing for me. I have ever been kind towards thee. Thou wilt do it for me. I would but look at him, this strange prophet. Men have talked so much of him. Often I have heard the Tetrarch talk of him. I think he is afraid of him, the Tetrarch. Art thou, even thou, also afraid of him, Narraboth?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN
I fear him not, Princess; there is no man I fear. But the Tetrarch has formally forbidden that any man should raise the cover of this well.

SALOMÉ
Thou wilt do this thing for me, Narraboth, and to-morrow when I pass in my litter beneath the gateway of the idol-sellers I will let fall for thee a little flower, a little green flower.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN
Princess, I cannot, I cannot.

SALOMÉ [*Smiling*]
Thou wilt do this thing for me, Narraboth. Thou knowest that thou wilt do this thing for me. And on the morrow when I pass my litter by the bridge of the idol-buyers, I will look at thee through the muslin veils, I will look at thee, Narraboth, it may be I will smile at thee. Look at me, Narraboth, look at me. Ah! thou knowest that thou wilt do what I ask of thee. Thou knowest it. . . . I know that thou wilt do this thing.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN [*Signing to the third soldier*]
Let the prophet come forth. . . . The Princess Salomé desires to see him.

SALOMÉ
Ah!

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS
Oh! How strange the moon looks. Like the hand of a dead woman who is seeking to cover herself with a shroud.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN
She has a strange aspect! She is like a little princess, whose eyes are eyes of amber. Through the clouds of muslin she is smiling like a little princess.

[*The prophet comes out of the cistern.* SALOMÉ *looks at him and steps slowly back.*]

JOKANAAN

Where is he whose cup of abominations is now full? Where is he, who in a robe of silver shall one day die in the face of all the people? Bid him come forth, that he may hear the voice of him who hath cried in the waste places and in the houses of kings.

SALOMÉ

Of whom is he speaking?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

No one can tell, Princess.

JOKANAAN

Where is she who saw the images of men painted on the walls, even the images of the Chaldeans painted with colours, and gave herself up unto the lust of her eyes, and sent ambassadors into the land of Chaldea?

SALOMÉ

It is of my mother that he is speaking?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Oh, no, Princess.

SALOMÉ

Yes; it is of my mother that he is speaking.

JOKANAAN

Where is she who gave herself unto the Captains of Assyria, who have baldricks on their loins, and crowns of many colours on their heads? Where is

she who hath given herself to the young men of the Egyptians, who are clothed in fine linen and hyacinth, whose shields are of gold, whose helmets are of silver, whose bodies are mighty? Go, bid her rise up from the bed of her abominations, from the bed of her incestuousness, that she may hear the words of him who prepareth the way of the Lord, that she may repent her of her iniquities. Though she will not repent, but will stick fast in her abominations; go, bid her come, for the fan of the Lord is in His hand.

SALOMÉ

Ah, but he is terrible, he is terrible!

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Do not stay here, Princess, I beseech you.

SALOMÉ

It is his eyes above all that are terrible. They are like black holes burned by torches in a tapestry of Tyre. They are like the black caverns of Egypt in which the dragons make their lairs. They are like black lakes troubled by fantastic moons. . . . Do you think he will speak again?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Do not stay here, Princess. I pray you do not stay here.

SALOMÉ

How wasted he is! He is like a thin ivory statue.

He is like an image of silver. I am sure he is chaste as the moon is. He is like a moonbeam, like a shaft of silver. I would look closer at him. I must look at him closer.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN
Princess! Princess!

JOKANAAN
Who is this woman who is looking at me? I will not have her look at me. Wherefore doth she look at me with her golden eyes, under her gilded eyelids. I know not who she is. I do not desire to know who she is. Bid her begone. It is not to her that I would speak.

SALOMÉ
I am Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa.

JOKANAAN
Back! daughter of Babylon! Come not near the chosen of the Lord. Thy mother hath filled the earth with the wine of her iniquities, and the cry of her sinning hath come up even to the ears of God.

SALOMÉ
Speak again, Jokanaan. Thy voice is as music to mine ear.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN
Princess! Princess! Princess!

SALOMÉ

Speak again! Speak again, Jokanaan, and tell me what I must do.

JOKANAAN

Daughter of Sodom, come not near me! But cover thy face with a veil, and scatter ashes upon thine head, and get thee to the desert and seek out the Son of Man.

SALOMÉ

Who is he, the Son of Man? Is he as beautiful as thou art, Jokanaan?

JOKANAAN

Get thee behind me! I hear in the palace the beating of the wings of the angel of death.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Princess, I beseech thee to go within.

JOKANAAN

Angel of the Lord God, what dost thou here with thy sword? Whom seekest thou in this palace? The day of him who shall die in a robe of silver has not yet come.

SALOMÉ

Jokanaan!

JOKANAAN

Who speaketh?

SALOMÉ

I am amorous of thy body, Jokanaan! Thy body is white like the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed. Thy body is white like the snows that lie on the mountains of Judæa, and come down into the valleys. The roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia are not so white as thy body. Neither the roses of the garden of the Queen of Arabia, the garden of spices of the Queen of Arabia, nor the feet of the dawn when they light on the leaves, nor the breast of the moon when she lies on the breast of the sea. . . . There is nothing in the world so white as thy body. Suffer me to touch thy body.

JOKANAAN

Back! daughter of Babylon! By woman came evil into the world. Speak not to me. I will not listen to thee. I listen but to the voice of the Lord God.

SALOMÉ

Thy body is hideous. It is like the body of a leper. It is like a plastered wall where vipers have crawled; like a plastered wall where the scorpions have made their nest. It is like a whitened sepulchre full of loathsome things. It is horrible, thy body is horrible. It is thy hair that I am enamoured of, Jokanaan. Thy hair is like clusters of grapes, like the clusters of black grapes that hang from the vine-trees of Edom in the land of the Edomites. Thy hair is like the cedars of Lebanon, like the great cedars of Leb-

anon that give their shade to the lions and to the robbers who would hide them by day. The long black nights, when the moon hides her face, when the stars are afraid, are not so black as thy hair. The silence that dwells in the forest is not so black. There is nothing in the world that is so black as thy hair. . . . Suffer me to touch thy hair.

JOKANAAN

Back, daughter of Sodom! Touch me not. Profane not the temple of the Lord God.

SALOMÉ

Thy hair is horrible. It is covered with mire and dust. It is like a knot of serpents coiled round thy neck. I love not thy hair. . . . It is thy mouth that I desire, Jokanaan. Thy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like a pomegranate cut in twain with a knife of ivory. The pomegranate-flowers that blossom in the gardens of Tyre, and are redder than roses, are not so red. The red blasts of trumpets that herald the approach of kings, and make afraid the enemy, are not so red. Thy mouth is redder than the feet of the doves who inhabit the temples and are fed by the priests. It is redder than the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion, and seen gilded tigers. Thy mouth is like a branch of coral that fishers have found in the twilight of the sea, the coral that they keep for the kings! . . . It is like the

vermilion that the Moabites find in the mines of Moab, the vermilion that the kings take from them. It is like the bow of the King of the Persians, that is painted with vermilion, and is tipped with coral. There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth. . . . Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

JOKANAAN

Never! daughter of Babylon! Daughter of Sodom! Never.

SALOMÉ

I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. I will kiss thy mouth.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Princess, Princess, thou who art like a garden of myrrh, thou who art the dove of all doves, look not at this man, look not at him! Do not speak such words to him. I cannot endure it. . . . Princess, do not speak these things.

SALOMÉ

I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Ah! [*He kills himself and falls between* SALOMÉ *and* JOKANAAN.]

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

The young Syrian has slain himself! The young captain has slain himself! He has slain himself who

was my friend! I gave him a little box of perfumes and ear-rings wrought in silver, and now he has killed himself! Ah, did he not say that some misfortune would happen? I too said it, and it has come to pass. Well I knew that the moon was seeking a dead thing, but I knew not that it was he whom she sought. Ah! why did I not hide him from the moon? If I had hidden him in a cavern she would not have seen him.

FIRST SOLDIER

Princess, the young captain has just slain himself.

SALOMÉ

Suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan.

JOKANAAN

Art thou not afraid, daughter of Herodias? Did I not tell thee that I had heard in the palace the beating of the wings of the angel of death, and hath he not come, the angel of death?

SALOMÉ

Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

JOKANAAN

Daughter of adultery, there is but one who can save thee, it is He of whom I spake. Go seek Him. He is in a boat on the sea of Galilee, and He talketh with His disciples. Kneel down on the shore of the sea, and call unto Him by His name. When He

cometh to thee (and to all who call on Him He cometh), bow thyself at His feet and ask of Him the remissions of thy sins.

SALOMÉ

Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

JOKANAAN

Cursed be thou! daughter of an incestuous mother, be thou accursed!

SALOMÉ

I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan.

JOKANAAN

I will not look at thee, thou art accursed, Salomé, thou art accursed. [*He goes down into the cistern.*]

SALOMÉ

I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan; I will kiss thy mouth.

FIRST SOLDIER

We must bear away the body to another place. The Tetrarch does not care to see dead bodies, save the bodies of those whom he himself has slain.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

He was my brother, and nearer to me than a brother. I gave him a little box full of perfumes, and a ring of agate that he wore always on his hand. In the evening we were wont to walk by the river,

and among the almond trees, and he used to tell me of the things of his country. He spake ever very low. The sound of his voice was like the sound of the flute, of one who playeth upon the flute. Also he had much joy to gaze at himself in the river. I used to reproach him for that.

SECOND SOLDIER

You are right; we must hide the body. The Tetrarch must not see it.

FIRST SOLDIER

The Tetrarch will not come to this place. He never comes on the terrace. He is too much afraid of the prophet.

[*Enter* HEROD, HERODIAS, *and all the Court.*]

HEROD

Where is Salomé? Where is the Princess? Why did she not return to the banquet as I commanded her? Ah! there she is!

HERODIAS

You must not look at her! You are always looking at her!

HEROD

The moon has a strange look to-night. Has she not a strange look? She is like a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers. She is naked too. She is quite naked. The clouds are seeking to clothe

her nakedness, but she will not let them. She shows herself naked in the sky. She reels through the clouds like a drunken woman. . . . I am sure she is looking for lovers. Does she not reel like a drunken woman? She is like a mad woman, is she not?

HERODIAS

No; the moon is like the moon, that is all. Let us go within. . . . We have nothing to do here.

HEROD

I will stay here! Manasseh, lay carpets there. Light torches, bring forth the ivory table, and the tables of jasper. The air here is sweet. I will drink more wine with my guests. We must show all honours to the ambassadors of Cæsar.

HERODIAS

It is not because of them that you remain.

HEROD

Yes; the air is very sweet. Come, Herodias, our guests await us. Ah! I have slipped! I have slipped in blood! It is an ill omen. Wherefore is there blood here? . . . and this body, what does this body here? Think you I am like the King of Egypt, who gives no feast to his guests but that he shows them a corpse? Whose is it? I will not look on it.

FIRST SOLDIER

It is our captain, sire. He is the young Syrian

whom you made captain of the guard but three days gone.

HEROD

I issued no order that he should be slain.

SECOND SOLDIER

He slew himself, sire.

HEROD

For what reason? I had made him captain of my guard.

SECOND SOLDIER

We do not know, sire. But with his own hand he slew himself.

HEROD

That seems strange to me. I had thought it was but the Roman philosophers who slew themselves. Is it not true, Tigellinus, that the philosophers at Rome slay themselves?

TIGELLINUS

There be some who slay themselves, sire. They are the Stoics. The Stoics are people of no cultivation. They are ridiculous people. I myself regard them as being perfectly ridiculous.

HEROD

I also. It is ridiculous to kill oneself.

TIGELLINUS

Everybody at Rome laughs at them. The Emperor has written a satire against them. It is recited everywhere.

HEROD

Ah! he has written a satire against them? Cæsar is wonderful. He can do everything. . . . It is strange that the young Syrian has slain himself. I am sorry he has slain himself. I am very sorry; for he was fair to look upon. He was even very fair. He had very languorous eyes. I remember that I saw that he looked languorously at Salomé. Truly, I thought he looked too much at her.

HERODIAS

There are others who look too much at her.

HEROD

His father was a king. I drove him from his kingdom. And of his mother, who was a queen, you made a slave—Herodias. So he was here as my guest, as it were, and for that reason I made him my captain. I am sorry he is dead. Ho! why have you left the body here? I will not look at it—away with it! [*They take away the body.*] It is cold here. There is a wind blowing. Is there not a wind blowing?

HERODIAS

No; there is no wind.

HEROD

I tell you there is a wind that blows. . . . And I hear in the air something that is like the beating of wings, like the beating of vast wings. Do you not hear it?

HERODIAS

I hear nothing.

HEROD

I hear it no longer. But I heard it. It was the blowing of the wind. It has passed away. But no, I hear it again. Do you not hear it? It is just like the beating of wings.

HERODIAS

I tell you there is nothing. You are ill. Let us go within.

HEROD

I am not ill. It is your daughter who is sick to death. Never have I seen her so pale.

HERODIAS

I have told you not to look at her.

HEROD

Pour me forth wine. [*Wine is brought.*] Salomé, come drink a little wine with me. I have here a wine that is exquisite. Cæsar himself sent it me. Dip into it thy little red lips, that I may drain the cup.

SALOMÉ
I am not thirsty, Tetrarch.

HEROD
You hear how she answers me, this daughter of yours?

HERODIAS
She does right. Why are you always gazing at her?

HEROD
Bring me ripe fruits. [*Fruits are brought.*] Salomé, come and eat fruits with me. I love to see in a fruit the mark of thy little teeth. Bite but a little of this fruit that I may eat what is left.

SALOMÉ
I am not hungry, Tetrarch.

HEROD [*To* HERODIAS]
You see how you have brought up this daughter of yours.

HERODIAS
My daughter and I come of a royal race. As for thee, thy father was a camel driver! He was a thief and a robber to boot!

HEROD
Thou liest!

HERODIAS

Thou knowest well that it is true.

HEROD

Salomé, come and sit next to me. I will give thee the throne of thy mother.

SALOMÉ

I am not tired, Tetrarch.

HERODIAS

You see in what regard she holds you.

HEROD

Bring me—what is it that I desire? I forget. Ah! ah! I remember.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN

Behold the time is come! That which I foretold has come to pass. The day that I spoke of is at hand.

HERODIAS

Bid him be silent. I will not listen to his voice. This man is for ever hurling insults against me.

HEROD

He has said nothing against you. Besides, he is a very great prophet.

HERODIAS

I do not believe in prophets. Can a man tell what will come to pass? No man knows it. Also he is

for ever insulting me. But I think you are afraid of him. . . . I know well that you are afraid of him.

HEROD

I am not afraid of him. I am afraid of no man.

HERODIAS

I tell you, you are afraid of him. If you are not afraid of him why do you not deliver him to the Jews who for these six months past have been clamouring for him?

A JEW

Truly, my lord, it were better to deliver him into our hands.

HEROD

Enough on this subject. I have already given you my answer. I will not deliver him into your hands. He is a holy man. He is a man who has seen God.

A JEW

That cannot be. There is no man who hath seen God since the prophet Elias. He is the last man who saw God face to face. In these days God doth not show Himself. God hideth Himself. Therefore great evils have come upon the land.

ANOTHER JEW

Verily, no man knoweth if Elias the prophet did

indeed see God. Peradventure it was but the shadow of God that he saw.

A THIRD JEW

God is at no time hidden. He showeth Himself at all times and in all places. God is in what is evil even as He is in what is good.

A FOURTH JEW

Thou shouldst not say that. It is a very dangerous doctrine. It is a doctrine that cometh from Alexandria, where men teach the philosophy of the Greeks. And the Greeks are Gentiles. They are not even circumcised.

A FIFTH JEW

No one can tell how God worketh. His ways are very dark. It may be that the things which we call evil are good, and that the things which we call good are evil. There is no knowledge of any thing. We can but bow our heads to His will, for God is very strong. He breaketh in pieces the strong together with the weak, for He regardeth not any man.

FIRST JEW

Thou speaketh truly. Verily God is terrible. He breaketh in pieces the strong and the weak as a man breaks corn in a mortar. But as for man, he hath never seen God. No man hath seen God since the prophet Elias.

HERODIAS
Make them be silent. They weary me.

HEROD
But I have heard it said that Jokanaan is in very truth your prophet Elias.

THE JEW
That cannot be. It is more than three hundred years since the days of the prophet Elias.

HEROD
There be some who say that this man is Elias the prophet.

A NAZARENE
I am sure that he is Elias the prophet.

THE JEW
Nay, but he is not Elias the prophet.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN
Behold the day is at hand, the day of the Lord, and I hear upon the mountains the feet of Him who shall be the Saviour of the world.

HEROD
What does that mean? The Saviour of the world?

TIGELLINUS
It is a title that Cæsar adopts.

HEROD

But Cæsar is not coming into Judæa. Only yesterday I received letters from Rome. They contained nothing concerning this matter. And you, Tigellinus, who were at Rome during the winter, you heard nothing concerning this matter, did you?

TIGELLINUS

Sire, I heard nothing concerning the matter. I was explaining the title. It is one of Cæsar's titles.

HEROD

But Cæsar cannot come. He is too gouty. They say that his feet are like the feet of an elephant. Also there are reasons of State. He who leaves Rome loses Rome. He will not come. Howbeit, Cæsar is lord, he will come if such be his pleasure. Nevertheless, I think he will not come.

FIRST NAZARENE

It was not concerning Cæsar that the prophet spake these words, sire.

HEROD

How?—it was not concerning Cæsar?

FIRST NAZARENE

No, my lord.

HEROD

—Concerning whom then did he speak?

FIRST NAZARENE

Concerning The Messiah who has come

A JEW

The Messiah hath not come.

FIRST NAZARENE

He hath come, and everywhere He worketh miracles.

HERODIAS

Ho! ho! miracles! I do not believe in miracles. I have seen too many. [*To the Page.*] My fan.

FIRST NAZARENE

This man worketh true miracles. Thus, at a marriage which took place in a little town of Galilee, a town of some importance, He changed water into wine. Certain persons who were present related it to me. Also He healed two lepers that were seated before the Gate of Capernaum simply by touching them.

SECOND NAZARENE

Nay, it was blind men that He healed at Capernaum.

FIRST NAZARENE

Nay; they were lepers. But He hath healed blind people also, and He was seen on a mountain talking with angels.

A SADDUCEE

Angels do not exist.

A PHARISEE

Angels exist, but I do not believe that this Man has talked with them.

FIRST NAZARENE

He was seen by a great multitude of people talking with angels.

HERODIAS

How these men weary me! They are ridiculous! [*To the Page.*] Well! my fan! [*The Page gives her the fan.*] You have a dreamer's look; you must not dream. It is only sick people who dream. [*She strikes the Page with her fan.*]

SECOND NAZARENE

There is also the miracle of the daughter of Jairus.

FIRST NAZARENE

Yea, that is sure. No man can gainsay it.

HERODIAS

These men are mad. They have looked too long on the moon. Command them to be silent.

HEROD

What is this miracle of the daughter of Jairus?

FIRST NAZARENE

The daughter of Jairus was dead. This Man raised her from the dead.

HEROD

How! He raises people from the dead?

FIRST NAZARENE

Yea, sire, He raiseth the dead.

HEROD

I do not wish Him to do that. I forbid Him to do that. I suffer no man to raise the dead. This Man must be found and told that I forbid Him to raise the dead. Where is this Man at present?

SECOND NAZARENE

He is in every place, my lord, but it is hard to find Him.

FIRST NAZARENE

It is said that He is now in Samaria.

A JEW

It is easy to see that this is not the Messiah, if He is in Samaria. It is not to the Samaritans that The Messiah shall come. The Samaritans are accursed. They bring no offerings to the Temple.

SECOND NAZARENE

He left Samaria a few days since. I think that at the present moment He is in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem.

FIRST NAZARENE

No; He is not there. I have just come from Jeru-

salem. For two months they have had no tidings of Him.

HEROD

No matter! But let them find Him, and tell Him, thus saith Herod the King, "I will not suffer Thee to raise the dead!" To change water into wine, to heal the lepers and the blind. . . . He may do these things if He will. I say nothing against these things. In truth I hold it a kindly deed to heal a leper. But no man shall raise the dead. It would be terrible if the dead came back.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN

Ah! the wanton one! The harlot! Ah! the daughter of Babylon with her golden eyes and her gilded eyelids! Thus saith the Lord God, Let there come up against her a multitude of men. Let the people take stones and stone her. . . .

HERODIAS

Command him to be silent.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN

Let the captains of the hosts pierce her with their swords, let them crush her beneath their shields.

HERODIAS

Nay, but it is infamous.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN

It is thus that I will wipe out all wickedness from

the earth, and that all women shall learn not to imitate her abominations.

HERODIAS

You hear what he says against me? You suffer him to revile her who is your wife?

HEROD

He did not speak your name.

HERODIAS

What does that matter? You know well that it is I whom he seeks to revile. And I am your wife, am I not?

HEROD

Of a truth, dear and noble Herodias, you are my wife, and before that you were the wife of my brother.

HERODIAS

It was thou didst snatch me from his arms.

HEROD

Of a truth I was stronger than he was. . . . But let us not talk of that matter. I do not desire to talk of it. It is the cause of the terrible words that the prophet has spoken. Peradventure on account of it a misfortune will come. Let us not speak of this matter. Noble Herodias, we are not mindful of our guests. Fill thou my cup, my well-beloved. Ho! fill with wine the great goblets of silver, and the great goblets of glass. I will drink to Cæsar. There are Romans here, we must drink to Cæsar.

ALL

Cæsar! Cæsar!

HEROD

Do you not see your daughter, how pale she is?

HERODIAS

What is that to you if she be pale or not?

HEROD

Never have I seen her so pale.

HERODIAS

You must not look at her.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN

In that day the sun shall become black like sackcloth of hair, and the moon shall become like blood, and the stars of the heaven shall fall upon the earth like unripe figs that fall from the fig-tree, and the kings of the earth shall be afraid.

HERODIAS

Ah! Ah! I should like to see that day of which he speaks, when the moon shall become like blood, and when the stars shall fall upon the earth like unripe figs. This prophet talks like a drunken man . . . but I cannot suffer the sound of his voice. I hate his voice. Command him to be silent.

HEROD

I will not. I cannot understand what it is that he saith, but it may be an omen.

HERODIAS
I do not believe in omens. He speaks like a drunken man.

HEROD
It may be he is drunk with the wine of God.

HERODIAS
What wine is that, the wine of God? From what vineyards is it gathered? In what wine-press may one find it?

HEROD [*From this point he looks all the while at Salomé*]
Tigellinus, when you were at Rome of late, did the Emperor speak with you on the subject of . . . ?

TIGELLINUS
On what subject, my Lord?

HEROD
On what subject? Ah! I asked you a question, did I not? I have forgotten what I would have asked you.

HERODIAS
You are looking again at my daughter. You must not look at her. I have already said so.

HEROD
You say nothing else.

HERODIAS

I say it again.

HEROD

And that restoration of the Temple about which they have talked so much, will anything be done? They say the veil of the sanctuary has disappeared, do they not?

HERODIAS

It was thyself didst steal it. Thou speakest at random and without wit. I will not stay here. Let us go within.

[redacted]

Dance for me, Salomé.

HERODIAS

I will not have her dance.

SALOMÉ

I have no desire to dance, Tetrarch.

HEROD

Salomé, daughter of Herodias, dance for me.

HERODIAS

Peace! let her alone.

HEROD

I command thee to dance, Salomé.

SALOMÉ
I will not dance, Tetrarch.

HERODIAS [*Laughing*]
You see how she obeys you.

HEROD
What is it to me whether she dance or not? It is naught to me. To-night I am happy, I am exceeding happy. Never have I been so happy.

FIRST SOLDIER
The Tetrarch has a sombre look. Has he not a sombre look?

SECOND SOLDIER
Yes, he has a sombre look.

HEROD
Wherefore should I not be happy? Cæsar, who is lord of the world, Cæsar, who is lord of all things, loves me well. He has just sent me most precious gifts. Also he has promised me to summon to Rome the King of Cappadocia, who is my enemy. It may be that at Rome he will crucify him, for he is able to do all things that he has a mind to. Verily, Cæsar is lord. Therefore I do well to be happy. There is nothing in the world that can mar my happiness.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN
He shall be seated on this throne. He shall be clothed in scarlet and purple. In his hand he shall

bear a golden cup full of his blasphemies. And the angel of the Lord shall smite him. He shall be eaten of worms.

HERODIAS

You hear what he says about you. He says that you will be eaten of worms.

HEROD

It is not of me that he speaks. He speaks never against me. It is of the King of Cappadocia that he speaks; the King of Cappadocia who is mine enemy. It is he who shall be eaten of worms. It is not I. Never has he spoken word against me, this prophet, save that I sinned in taking to wife the wife of my brother. It may be he is right. For, of a truth, you are sterile.

HERODIAS

I am sterile, I? You say that, you that are ever looking at my daughter, you that would have her dance for your pleasure? You speak as a fool. I have borne a child. You have gotten no child, no, not on one of your slaves. It is you who are sterile, not I.

HEROD

Peace, woman! I say that you are sterile. You have borne me no child, and the prophet says that our marriage is not a true marriage. He says that it is a marriage of incest, a marriage that will bring

evils. . . . I fear he is right; I am sure that he is right. I would be happy at this. Of a truth, I am happy. There is nothing I lack.

HERODIAS

I am glad you are of so fair a humour to-night. It is not your custom. But it is late. Let us go within. Do not forget that we hunt at sunrise. All honours must be shown to Cæsar's ambassadors, must they not?

SECOND SOLDIER

The Tetrarch has a sombre look.

FIRST SOLDIER

Yes, he has a sombre look.

HEROD

Salomé, Salomé, dance for me. I pray thee dance for me. I am sad to-night. Yes; I am passing sad to-night. When I came hither I slipped in blood, which is an evil omen; also I heard in the air a beating of wings, a beating of giant wings. I cannot tell what they mean. . . . I am sad to-night. Therefore dance for me. Dance for me, Salomé, I beseech thee. If thou dancest for me thou mayest ask of me what thou wilt, and I will give it thee, even unto the half of my kingdom.

SALOMÉ [*Rising*]

Will you indeed give me whatsoever I shall ask of thee, Tetrarch?

HERODIAS

Do not dance, my daughter.

HEROD

Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, even unto the half of my kingdom.

SALOMÉ

You swear it, Tetrarch?

HEROD

I swear it, Salomé.

HERODIAS

Do not dance, my daughter.

SALOMÉ

By what will you swear this thing, Tetrarch?

HEROD

By my life, by my crown, by my gods. Whatsoever thou shalt desire I will give it thee, even to the half of my kingdom, if thou wilt but dance for me. O Salomé, Salomé, dance for me!

SALOMÉ

You have sworn an oath, Tetrarch.

HEROD

I have sworn an oath.

HERODIAS

My daughter, do not dance.

HEROD

Even to the half of my kingdom. Thou wilt be passing fair as a queen, Salomé, if it please thee to ask for the half of my kingdom. Will she not be fair as a queen? Ah! it is cold here! There is an icy wind, and I hear . . . wherefore do I hear in the air this beating of wings? Ah! one might fancy a huge black bird that hovers over the terrace. Why can I not see it, this bird? The beat of its wings is terrible. The breath of the wind of its wings is terrible. It is a chill wind. Nay, but it is not cold, it is hot. I am choking. Pour water on my hands. Give me snow to eat. Loosen my mantle. Quick! quick! loosen my mantle. Nay, but leave it. It is my garland that hurts me, my garland of roses. The flowers are like fire. They have burned my forehead. [*He tears the wreath from his head and throws it on the table.*] Ah! I can breathe now. How red those petals are! They are like stains of blood on the cloth. That does not matter. It is not wise to find symbols in everything that one sees. It makes life too full of terrors. It were better to say that stains of blood are as lovely as rose petals. It were better far to say that. . . . But we will not speak of this. Now I am happy. I am passing happy. Have I not the right to be happy? Your daughter is going to dance for me. Wilt thou not dance for me, Salomé? Thou hast promised to dance for me.

HERODIAS

I will not have her dance.

SALOMÉ

I will dance for you, Tetrarch.

HEROD

You hear what your daughter says. She is going to dance for me. Thou doest well to dance for me, Salomé. And when thou hast danced for me, forget not to ask of me whatsoever thou hast a mind to ask. Whatsoever thou shalt desire I will give it thee, even to the half of my kingdom. I have sworn it, have I not?

SALOMÉ

Thou hast sworn it, Tetrarch.

HEROD

And I have never broken my word. I am not of those who break their oaths. I know not how to lie. I am the slave of my word, and my word is the word of a king. The King of Cappadocia had ever a lying tongue, but he is no true king. He is a coward. Also he owes me money that he will not repay. He has even insulted my ambassadors. He has spoken words that were wounding. But Cæsar will crucify him when he comes to Rome. I know that Cæsar will crucify him. And if he crucify him not, yet will he die, being eaten of worms. The prophet has

prophesied it. Well! wherefore dost thou tarry, Salomé?

SALOMÉ

I am waiting until my slaves bring perfumes to me and the seven veils, and take from off my feet my sandals. [*Slaves bring perfumes and the seven veils, and take off the sandals of* SALOMÉ.]

HEROD

Ah, thou art to dance with naked feet. 'Tis well! 'Tis well. Thy little feet will be like white doves. They will be like little white flowers that dance upon the trees. . . . No, no, she is going to dance on blood. There is blood spilt on the ground. She must not dance on blood. It were an evil omen.

HERODIAS

What is it to thee if she dance on blood? Thou hast waded deep enough in it. . . .

HEROD

What is it to me? Ah! look at the moon! She has become red. She has become red as blood. Ah! the prophet prophesied truly. He prophesied that the moon would become as blood. Did he not prophesy it? All of ye heard him prophesying it. And now the moon has become as blood. Do ye not see it?

HERODIAS

Oh, yes, I see it well, and the stars are falling like

unripe figs, are they not? and the sun is becoming black like sackcloth of hair, and the kings of the earth are afraid. That at least one can see. The prophet is justified of his words in that at least, for truly the kings of the earth are afraid. . . . Let us go within. You are sick. They will say at Rome that you are mad. Let us go within, I tell you.

THE VOICE OF JOKANAAN

Who is this who cometh from Edom, who is this who cometh from Bozra, whose raiment is dyed with purple, who shineth in the beauty of his garments, who walketh mighty in his greatness? Wherefore is thy raiment stained with scarlet?

HERODIAS

Let us go within. The voice of that man maddens me. I will not have my daughter dance while he is continually crying out. I will not have her dance while you look at her in this fashion. In a word, I will not have her dance.

HEROD

Do not rise, my wife, my queen, it will avail thee nothing. I will not go within till she hath danced. Dance, Salomé, dance for me.

HERODIAS

Do not dance, my daughter.

SALOMÉ
I am ready, Tetrarch.
[SALOMÉ *dances the dance of the seven veils.*]

HEROD
Ah! wonderful! wonderful! You see that she has danced for me, your daughter. Come near, Salomé, come near, that I may give thee thy fee. Ah! I pay a royal price to those who dance for my pleasure. I will pay thee royally. I will give thee whatsoever thy soul desireth. What wouldst thou have? Speak.

SALOMÉ [*Kneeling*]
I would that they presently bring me in a silver charger . . .

HEROD [*Laughing*]
In a silver charger? Surely yes, in a silver charger. She is charming, is she not? What is it thou wouldst have in a silver charger, O sweet and fair Salomé, thou art fairer than all the daughters of Judæa? What wouldst thou have them bring thee in a silver charger? Tell me. Whatsoever it may be, thou shalt receive it. My treasures belong to thee. What is it that thou wouldst have, Salomé?

SALOMÈ [*Rising*]
The head of Jokanaan.

HERODIAS
Ah! that is well said, my daughter.

HEROD

No, no!

HERODIAS

That is well said, my daughter.

HEROD

No, no, Salomé. It is not that thou desirest. Do not listen to thy mother's voice. She is ever giving thee evil counsel. Do not heed her.

SALOMÉ

It is not my mother's voice that I heed. It is for mine own pleasure that I ask the head of Jokanaan in a silver charger. You have sworn an oath, Herod. Forget not that you have sworn an oath.

HEROD

I know it. I have sworn an oath by my gods. I know it well. But I pray thee, Salomé, ask of me something else. Ask of me the half of my kingdom, and I will give it thee. But ask not of me what thy lips have asked.

SALOMÉ

I ask of you the head of Jokanaan.

HEROD

No, no, I will not give it thee.

SALOMÉ

You have sworn an oath, Herod.

HERODIAS

Yes, you have sworn an oath. Everybody heard you. You swore it before everybody.

HEROD

Peace, woman! It is not to you I speak.

HERODIAS

My daughter has done well to ask the head of Jokanaan. He has covered me with insults. He has said unspeakable things against me. One can see that she loves her mother well. Do not yield, my daughter. He has sworn an oath, he has sworn an oath.

HEROD

Peace! Speak not to me! . . . Salomé, I pray thee be not stubborn. I have ever been kind toward thee. I have ever loved thee. . . . It may be that I have loved thee too much. Therefore ask not this thing of me. This is a terrible thing, an awful thing to ask of me. Surely, I think thou art jesting. The head of a man that is cut from his body is ill to look upon, is it not? It is not meet that the eyes of a virgin should look upon such a thing. What pleasure couldst thou have in it? There is no pleasure that thou couldst have in it. No, no, it is not that thou desirest. Hearken to me. I have an emerald, a great emerald, thou canst see that which passeth afar off. Cæsar himself carries such an em-

erald when he goes to the circus. But my emerald is the larger. I know well that it is the larger. It is the largest emerald in the whole world. Thou wilt take that, wilt thou not? Ask it of me, and I will give it thee.

SALOMÉ

I demand the head of Jokanaan.

HEROD

Thou art not listening. Thou art not listening. Suffer me to speak, Salomé.

SALOMÉ

The head of Jokanaan.

HEROD

No, no, thou wouldst not have that. Thou sayest that but to trouble me, because I have looked at thee and ceased not this night. It is true, I have looked at thee and ceased not this night. Thy beauty has troubled me. Thy beauty has grievously troubled me, and I have looked at thee over-much. Nay, but I will look at thee no more. One should not look at anything. Neither at things, nor at people should one look. Only in mirrors is it well to look, for mirrors do but show us masks. Oh! oh! bring wine! I thirst. . . . Salomé, Salomé, let us be as friends. Bethink thee. . . . Ah! what would I say? What was't? Ah! I remember it! . . . Salomé —nay but come nearer to me; I fear thou wilt not

hear my words—Salomé, thou knowest my white peacocks, my beautiful white peacocks, that walk in the garden between the myrtles and the tall cypress trees. Their beaks are gilded with gold and the grains that they eat are smeared with gold, and their feet are stained with purple. When they cry out the rain comes, and the moon shows herself in the heavens when they spread their tails. Two by two they walk between the cypress trees and the black myrtles, and each has a slave to tend it. Sometimes they fly across the trees, and anon they crouch in the grass, and round the pools of the water. There are not in all the world birds so wonderful. I know that Cæsar himself has no birds so fair as my birds. I will give thee fifty of my peacocks. They will follow thee whithersoever thou goest, and in the midst of them thou wilt be like unto the moon in the midst of a great white cloud. . . . I will give them to thee all. I have but a hundred, and in the whole world there is no king who has peacocks like unto my peacocks. But I will give them all to thee. Only thou must loose me from my oath, and must not ask of me that which thy lips have asked of me. [*He empties the cup of wine.*]

SALOMÉ

Give me the head of Jokanaan.

HERODIAS

Well said, my daughter! As for you, you are ridiculous with your peacocks.

HEROD

Ah! thou art not listening to me. Be calm. As for me, am I not calm? I am altogether calm. Listen. I have jewels hidden in this place—jewels that thy mother even has never seen; jewels that are marvellous to look at. I have a collar of pearls, set in four rows. They are like unto moons chained with rays of silver. They are even as half a hundred moons caught in a golden net. On the ivory breast of a queen they have rested. Thou shalt be as fair as a queen when thou wearest them. I have amethysts of two kinds, one that is black like wine, and one that is red like wine that one has coloured with water. I have topazes, yellow as are the eyes of tigers, and topazes that are pink as the eyes of a wood-pigeon, and green topazes that are as the eyes of cats. I have opals that burn always, with a flame that is cold as ice, opals that make sad men's minds, and are afraid of the shadows. I have onyxes like the eyeballs of a dead woman. I have moonstones that change when the moon changes, and are wan when they see the sun. I have sapphires big like eggs, and as blue as blue flowers. The sea wanders within them and the moon comes never to trouble the blue of their waves. I have chrysolites and beryls and chrysoprases and rubies. I have sardonyx and hyacinth stones, and stones of chalcedony, and I will give them all unto thee, all, and other things will I add to them. The King of the Indies has but even now sent me four fans fash-

ioned from the feathers of parrots, and the King of Numidia a garment of ostrich feathers. I have a crystal, into which it is not lawful for a woman to look, nor may young men behold it until they have been beaten with rods. In a coffer of nacre I have three wondrous turquoises. He who wears them on his forehead can imagine things which are not, and he who carries them in his hand can turn the fruitful woman into a woman that is barren. These are great treasures above all price. But this is not all. In an ebony coffer I have two cups, amber, that are like apples of pure gold. If an enemy pour poison into these cups they become like apples of silver. In a coffer incrusted with amber I have sandals incrusted with glass. I have mantles that have been brought from the land of the Seres, and bracelets decked about with carbuncles and with jade that come from the city of Euphrates. . . . What desirest thou more than this, Salomé! Tell me the thing that thou desirest, and I will give it thee. All that thou askest I will give thee, save one thing only. I will give thee all that is mine, save only the head of one man. I will give thee the mantle of the high priest. I will give thee the veil of the sanctuary.

THE JEWS
Oh! oh!

SALOMÉ
Give me the head of Jokanaan.

HEROD [*Sinking back in his seat*]

Let her be given what she asks! Of a truth she is her mother's child! [*The first Soldier approaches.* HERODIAS *draws from the hand of the Tetrarch the ring of death, and gives it to the Soldier, who straightway bears it to the Executioner. The Executioner looks scared.*] Who has taken my ring? There was a ring on my right hand. Who has drunk my wine? There was wine in my cup. It was full of wine. Someone has drunk it! Oh! surely some evil will befall some one. [*The Executioner goes down into the cistern.*] Ah! Wherefore did I give my oath? Hereafter, let no king swear an oath. If he keep it not, it is terrible, and if he keep it, it is terrible also.

HERODIAS

My daughter has done well.

[redacted]

I am sure that some misfortune will happen.

SALOMÉ [*She leans over the cistern and listens*]

There is no sound. I hear nothing. Why does he not cry out, this man? Ah! if any man sought to kill me, I would cry out, I would struggle, I would not suffer. . . . Strike, strike, Naaman, strike, I tell you. . . . No, I hear nothing. There is a silence, a terrible silence. Ah! something has fallen upon the ground. I heard something fall. He is afraid, this slave. He is a coward, this slave! Let

soldiers be sent. [*She sees the Page of* HERODIAS *and addresses him.*] Come thither, thou wert the friend of him who is dead, wert thou not? Well, I tell thee, there are not dead men enough. Go to the soldiers and bid them go down and bring me the thing I ask, the thing the Tetrarch has promised me, the thing that is mine. [*The Page recoils. She turns to the soldiers.*] Hither, ye soldiers. Get ye down into this cistern and bring me the head of this man. Tetrarch, Tetrarch, command your soldiers that they bring me the head of Jokanaan. [*A huge black arm, the arm of the Executioner, comes forth from the cistern, bearing on a silver shield the head of* JOKANAAN. SALOMÉ *seizes it.* HEROD *hides his face with his cloak.* HERODIAS *smiles and fans herself. The Nazarenes fall on their knees and begin to pray.*] Ah! thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. Well, I will kiss it now. I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit. Yes, I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. I said it; did I not say it? I said it. Ah! I will kiss it now. . . . But, wherefore dost thou not look at me, Jokanaan? Thine eyes that were so terrible, so full of rage and scorn, are shut now. Wherefore are they shut? Open thine eyes! Lift up thine eyelids, Jokanaan! Wherefore dost thou not look at me? Art thou afraid of me, Jokanaan, that thou wilt not look at me? . . . And thy tongue, that was like a red snake darting

poison, it moves no more, it speaks no words, Jokanaan, that scarlet viper that spat its venom upon me. It is strange, is it not? How is it that the red viper stirs no longer? . . . Thou wouldst have none of me, Jokanaan. Thou rejectedst me. Thou didst speak evil words against me. Thou didst bear thyself toward me as to a harlot, as to a woman that is a wanton, to me, Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa! Well, I still live, but thou art dead, and thy head belongs to me. I can do with it what I will. I can throw it to the dogs and to the birds of the air. That which the dogs leave, the birds of the air shall devour. . . . Ah, Jokanaan, thou wert the man that I loved alone among men. All other men were hateful to me. But thou wert beautiful! Thy body was a column of ivory set upon feet of silver. It was a garden full of doves and lilies of silver. It was a tower of silver decked with shields of ivory. There was nothing in the world so white as thy body. There was nothing in the world so black as thy hair. In the whole world there was nothing so red as thy mouth. Thy voice was a censer that scattered strange perfumes, and when I looked on thee I heard a strange music. Ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me, Jokanaan? With the cloak of thine hands and with the cloak of thy blasphemies thou didst hide thy face. Thou didst put upon thine eyes the covering of him who would see his God. Well, thou hast seen thy God, Jokanaan,

but me, me, thou didst never see. If thou hadst seen me thou hadst loved me. I saw thee, and I loved thee. Oh, how I loved thee! I love thee yet, Jokanaan, I love only thee. . . . I am athirst for thy beauty; I am hungry for thy body; and neither wine nor apples can appease my desire. What shall I do now, Jokanaan? Neither the floods nor the great waters can quench my passion. I was a princess, and thou didst scorn me. I was a virgin, and thou didst take my virginity from me. I was chaste, and thou didst fill my veins with fire. . . . Ah! ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me? If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me. Well I know that thou wouldst have loved me, and the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death.

[redacted]

She is monstrous, thy daughter, I tell thee she is monstrous. In truth, what she has done is a great crime. I am sure that it is. A crime against some unknown God.

[redacted]

I am well pleased with my daughter. She has done well. And I would stay here now.

Herod [*Rising*]

Ah! There speaks my brother's wife! Come! I will not stay in this place. Come, I tell thee. Surely some terrible thing will befall. Manasseh, Issadar,

Zias, put out the torches. I will not look at things, I will not suffer things to look at me. Put out the torches! Hide the moon! Hide the stars! Let us hide ourselves in our palace, Herodias. I begin to be afraid.

[*The slaves put out the torches. The stars disappear. A great cloud crosses the moon and conceals it completely. The stage becomes quite dark. The Tetrarch begins to climb the staircase.*]

THE VOICE OF SALOMÉ

Ah! I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth. There was a bitter taste on my lips. Was it the taste of blood? . . . Nay; but perchance it was the taste of love. . . . They say that love hath a bitter taste. . . . But what matter? what matter? I have kissed thy mouth.

HEROD [*Turning round and seeing* SALOMÈ]

Kill that woman!

[*The soldiers rush forward and crush beneath their shields* SALOMÉ, *daughter of* HERODIAS, *Princess of Judæa.*]

CURTAIN

AN OPENING SCENE WRITTEN BY

T. STURGE MOORE, ESQ.,

FOR THE ACTING VERSION OF

A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

GUIDO BARDI, a Florentine Prince.

SIMONE, a Merchant.

BIANCA, his Wife.

MARIA, a Tire-woman.

The action takes place at Florence.

A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

Head.

[*The scene represents a tapestried upper room giving on to a balcony or loggia in an old house at Florence. A table laid for a frugal meal, a spinning-wheel, distaff, etc., chests, chairs and stools.*]

As the Curtain Rises Enter Bianca, with her Servant, Maria.

MARIA

Certain and sure, the sprig is Guido Bardi,
A lovely lord, a lord whose blood is blue!

BIANCA

But where did he receive you?

MARIA

Where, but there
In yonder palace, in a painted hall!—
Painted with naked women on the walls,—
Would make a common man or blush or smile
But he seemed not to heed them, being a lord.

BIANCA

But how know you 'tis not a chamberlayne,
A lackey merely?

MARIA
Why, how know I there is a God in heaven?
Because the angels have a master surely.
So to this lord they bowed, all others bowed,
And swept the marble flags, doffing their caps,
With the gay plumes. Because he stiffly said,
And seemed to see me as those folk are seen
That will be never seen again by you,
"Woman, your mistress then returns this purse
Of forty thousand crowns, is it fifty thousand?
Come name the sum will buy me grace of her."

BIANCA
What, were there forty thousand crowns therein?

MARIA
I know it was all gold; heavy with gold.

BIANCA
It must be he, none else could give so much.

MARIA
'Tis he, 'tis my lord Guido, Guido Bardi.

BIANCA
What said you?

MARIA
I, I said my mistress never
Looked at the gold, never opened the purse,
Never counted a coin. But asked again

What she had asked before. "How young you looked?
How handsome your lordship looked? What doublet
Your majesty had on? What chains, what hose
Upon your revered legs?" And curtseyed I, . . .

BIANCA
What said he?

MARIA
Curtseyed I, and he replied,
"Has she a lover then beside that old
Soured husband or is it him she loves, my God!
Is it him?"

BIANCA
Well?

MARIA
Curtseyed I low and said
"Not him, my lord, nor you, nor no man else.
Thou art rich, my lord, and honoured, my lord, and she
Though not so rich is honoured . . . "

BIANCA
Fool, you fool,
I never bid you say a word of that.

MARIA
Nor did I say a word of that: you said,
I said, "She loves him not, my lord, nor loves
Any man else. Yet she might like to love,

If she were loved by one who pleased her well;
For she is weary of spinning long alone.
She is not rich and yet she is not poor; but young
She is, my lord, and you are young.
(*Pauses smiling.*)

BIANCA

Quick, quick!

MARIA

There, there! 'Twas but to show you how I smiled
Saying the lord was young. It took him too;
For he said, "This will do! If I should call
To-night to pay respect unto your lovely—
Our lovely mistress, tell her that I said,
Our lovely mistress, shall I be received?"
And I said, "Yes." "Then say I come and if
All else is well let her throw down some favour,
When as I pass below." He should be there!
Look from the balcony; he should be there!—
And there he is, dost see?

BIANCA

Some favour. Yes.
This ribbon weighted by this brooch will do.
Maria, be you busy near within, but, till
I call take care you enter not. Go down
And let the young lord in, for hark, he knocks.
[*Exit Maria.*]
Great ladies might he choose from and yet he

Is drawn . . . ah, there my fear is! Was he drawn
By love to me—by love's young strength alone?
That's where it is, if I were sure he loved,
I then might do what greater dames have done
And venge me on a husband blind to beauty.
But if! Ah if! he is a wandering bee,
Mere gallant taster, who befools poor flowers . . .
[*Maria opens the door for Guido Bardi, and then withdraws.*]
My lord, I lea[r]n that we have something here,
In this poor house, which thou dost wish to buy.
My husband is from home, but my poor fate
Has made me perfect in the price of velvets,
Of silks and gay brocades. I think you offered
Some forty thousand crowns, or fifty thousand,
For something we have here? And it must be
That wonder of the loom, which my Simone
Has lately home; it is a Lucca damask,
The web is silver over-wrought with roses.
Since you did offer fifty thousand crowns
It must be that. Pray wait for I will fetch it.

GUIDO

Nay, nay, thou gracious wonder of a loom
More cunning far than those of Lucca. I
Had in my thought no damask silver cloth
By hunch-back weavers woven toilsomely.
If such are priced at fifty thousand crowns

It shames me, for I hoped to buy a fabric
For which a hundred thousand then were little.

BIANCA
A hundred thousand was it that you said?
Nay, poor Simone for so great a sum
Would sell you everything the house contains.
The thought of such a sum doth daze the brains
Of merchant folk who live such lives as ours.

GUIDO
Would he sell everything this house contains?
And everyone, would he sell everyone?

BIANCA
Oh, everything and everyone, my lord,
Unless it were himself; he values not
A woman as a velvet, or a wife
At half the price of silver-threaded woof.

GUIDO
Then I would strike a bargain with him straight.

BIANCA
He is from home; may be will sleep from home;
But I, my lord, can show you all we have;
Can measure ells and sum their price, my lord.

[redacted]
It is thyself, Bianca, I would buy.

BIANCA

O, then, my lord, it must be with Simone
You strike your bargain; for to sell myself
Would be to do what I most truly loathe.
Good-night, my lord; it is with deep regret
I find myself unable to oblige
Your lordship.

GUIDO

Nay, I pray thee let me stay
And pardon me the sorry part I played,
As though I were a chapman and intent
To lower prices, cheapen honest wares.

BIANCA

My lord, there is no reason you should stay.

GUIDO

Thou art my reason, peerless, perfect, thou,
The reason I am here and my life's goal,
For I was born to love the fairest things . . .

BIANCA

To buy the fairest things that can be bought.

GUIDO

Cruel Bianca! Cover me with scorn,
I answer born to love thy priceless self,
That never to a market could be brought,
No more than winged souls that sail and soar
Among the planets or about the moon.

BIANCA
It is so much thy habit to buy love,
Or that which is for sale and labelled love,
Hardly couldst thou conceive of priceless love.
But though my love has never been for sale
I have been in a market bought and sold.

GUIDO
This is some riddle which thy sweet wit reads
To baffle mine and mock me yet again.

BIANCA
My marriage, sir, I speak of marriage now,
That common market where my husband went
And prides himself he made a bargain then.

GUIDO
The wretched chapman, how I hate his soul.

BIANCA
He was a better bidder than thyself,
And knew with whom to deal . . . he did not speak
Of gold to me, but in my father's ear
He made it clink: to me he spoke of love.
Honest and free and open without price.

GUIDO
O white Bianca, lovely as the moon,
The light of thy pure soul and shining wit
Shows me my shame, and makes the thing I was
Slink like a shadow from the thing I am.

BIANCA

Let that which casts the shadow act, my lord,
And waste no thought on what its shadow does
Or has done. Are youth, and strength, and love
Balked by mere shadows, so that they forget
Themselves so far they cannot be recalled?

GUIDO

Nobility is here, not in the court.
There are the tinsel stars, here is the moon,
Whose tranquil splendour makes a day of night.
I have been starved by ladies, specks of light,
And glory drowns me now I see the moon.

BIANCA

I have refused round sums of solid gold
And shall not be by tinsel phrases bought.

GUIDO

Dispute no more, witty, divine Bianca;
Dispute no more. See I have brought my lute!
Close lock the door. We will sup with the moon
Like Persian princes, that, in Babylon
Sup in the hanging gardens of the king.
I know an air that can suspend the soul
As high in heaven as those towered-gardens hang.

BIANCA

My husband may return, we are not safe.

GUIDO

Didst thou not say that he would sleep from home?

BIANCA
He was not sure, he said it might be so.
He was not sure—and he would send my aunt
To sleep with me, if he did so decide,
And she has not yet come.

GUIDO [*Starting*]
Hark, what's that?

[*They listen, the sound of Maria's voice in anger with some one is faintly heard.*]

BIANCA
It is Maria scolds some gossip crone.

GUIDO
I thought the other voice had been a man's.

BIANCA
All still again, old crones are often gruff.
You should be gone, my lord.

GUIDO
O, sweet Bianca!
How can I leave thee now! Thy beauty made
Two captives of my eyes, and they were mad
To feast them on thy form, but now thy wit,
The liberated perfume of a bud,
Which while a bud seemed perfect, but now is
That which can make its former self forgot:
How can I leave the flower who loved the leaf?
Till now I was the richest prince in Florence,

I am a lover now would shun its throngs,
And put away all state and seek retreat
At Bellosguardo or Fiesole,
Where roses in their fin'st profusion hide
Some marble villa whose cool walls have rung
A laughing echo to Decameron,
And where thy laughter shall as gaily sound.
Say thou canst love or with a silent kiss
Instil that balmy knowledge on my soul.

BIANCA

Canst tell me what love is?

GUIDO

It is consent.
The union of two minds, two souls, two hearts,
In all they think and hope, and feel.

BIANCA

Such lovers might as well be dumb, for those
Who think and hope and feel alike can never
Have anything for one another's ear.

GUIDO

Love is? Love is the meeting of two worlds
In never ending change and counter change.

BIANCA

Thus will my husband praise the mercer's mart,
Where the two worlds of East and West exchange.

GUIDO
Come. Love is love, a kiss, a close embrace.
It is . . .

BIANCA
My husband calls that love
When he hath slammed his weekly ledger to.

GUIDO
I find my wit no better match for thine
Than thou art match for an old crabbed man;
But I am sure my youth and strength and blood
Keep better tune with beauty gay, and bright,
As thine is, than lean age and miser toil.

BIANCA
Well said, well said, I think he would not dare
To face thee, more than owls dare face the sun;
He's the bent shadow such a form as thine
Might cast upon a dung heap by the road,
Though should it fall upon a proper floor
'Twould be at once a better man than he.

GUIDO
Your merchant living in the dread of loss
Becomes perforce a coward, eats his heart.
Dull souls they are, who, like caged prisoners, watch
And envy others joy; they taste no food
But what its cost is present to their thought.

BIANCA

I am my father's daughter, in his eyes
A home-bred girl who has been taught to spin.
He never seems to think I have a face
Which makes you gallants turn where'er I pass.

GUIDO

Thy night is darker than I dreamed, bright Star.

BIANCA

He waits, stands by, and mutters to himself,
And never enters with a frank address
To any company. His eyes meet mine
And with a shudder I am sure he counts
The cost of what I wear.

GUIDO

Forget him quite.
Come, come, escape from out this dismal life,
As a bright butterfly breaks spider's web,
And nest with me among those rosy bowers,
Where we will love, as though the lives we led
Till yesterday were ghoulish dreams dispersed
By the great dawn of limpid joyous life.

BIANCA

Will I not come?

GUIDO

O, make no question, come.
They waste their time who ponder o'er bad dreams.

We will away to hills, red roses clothe,
And though the persons who did haunt that dream
Live on, they shall by distance dwindled, seem
No bigger than the smallest ear of corn,
That cowers at the passing of a bird,
And silent shall they seem, out of ear-shot,
Those voices that could jar, while we gaze back
From rosy caves upon the hill-brow open,
And ask ourselves if what we see is not
A picture merely,—if dusty, dingy lives
Continue there to choke themselves with malice.
Wilt thou not come, Bianca? Wilt thou not?
[*A sound on the stair.*]

GUIDO
What's that?
[*The door opens, they separate guiltily, and the husband enters.*]

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